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A  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
ENQUIRY

CONCERNING THE  
CONNEXION

BETWEEN THE

*Doctrines and Miracles*

OF

*JESUS CHRIST.*

In a Letter to a FRIEND.

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BY

GEORGE TURNBULL, A.M. K.

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*The Second EDITION, with large Additions.*

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L O N D O N :

Printed for R. WILLOCK, at Sir Isaac Newton's  
Head near the Royal Exchange in Cornhill. 1732.

[Price One Shilling and Six Pence.]



A  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
ENQUIRY

CONCERNING THE  
CONNECTION  
BETWEEN THE

IDEAS AND MATTERS  
OF

THE SENSIBLE  
WORLD

BY  
GEORGE TOMLINSON

IN TWO VOLUMES

LONDON

Printed by J. JOHNSON, Strand





# PREFACE.

**I***F a Preface or Apology is necessary in any case, it is certainly when a Letter to a Friend assumes a more publick character; and instead of a private misssive, becomes an epistle to the world.*

*By way of apology may it therefore suffice; that tho' the author was advised, nay pressed, to send this private letter to the press; yet what only prevail'd with him to do it, was, that he seriously thought it might chance to convince some one doubter or other, of the truth of Christianity: And if it does he is sure of thanks for publishing it; if it does not, some body will probably take the trouble to point out the lameness of the reasoning; and so may perhaps give him new light, shew him his mistake, and help him to a better argument; and in that case too he will have this reward.*

ADVER-





## ADVERTISEMENT.

**U**PON reviewing the first Edition of this ENQUIRY, I thought it proper to make some few changes and additions in order to render it a full and compleat demonstration of the Connexion between the *Doctrines* and *Works* of JESUS CHRIST: and have now no more to say upon that subject. as for the other part promised, I only want some short time to put in order for the press, what I have long had by me upon that argument, so the Publick may expect to have it very soon.



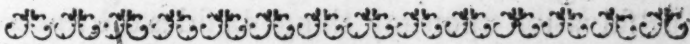




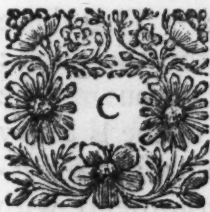
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*April 10.*  
1726.

# ENQUIRY, &c.



## INTRODUCTION.



CHRISTIANITY, my Friend,  
has been attacked with so much  
zeal of late; that a meer stranger  
would certainly imagine, the hap-  
piness of mankind depended up-  
on being delivered from it. That  
it was a belief of the most fatal, pernicious influ-  
ence; a dismal enslaving doctrine, which ren-  
dered it's disciples incapable of living agreea-  
bly. For who could think that any one, who  
had the least regard to his own private interest,  
or that of society in general, would take pains to  
ruin the credit of a prevailing faith, which evident-  
ly tends to encourage virtue and to curb every  
vitious affection? Yet these who have so keen-  
ly disputed the evidence of the Christian Religi-  
gion, never dared to find fault with the morals



it teaches. And hardly will any one adventure to say, “ That the perswasion of a future  
 “ state, is not a most powerful motive to the  
 “ practice of virtue and a good life: or that  
 “ mankind would be more virtuous without such  
 “ an incitement.”

To correct the false doctrines and tenets of certain professing Christians, is indeed a good office. And the corruptions and abuses that prevail in Churches, most undeservedly called Christian, ought to be exposed in their proper colours. Or, in one word, if any Christian teachers represent the doctrines of CHRIST in a false light; and put the stress of Religion and our salvation upon any thing, besides the sincere love and practice of every moral virtue, their error ought to be discovered and refuted. And our SAVIOUR himself has shewn us the way, by his manner of reasoning with the Jewish Doctors. But this is the sum of Christianity: “ That there  
 “ is a future state of happiness for the good:  
 “ and of punishments, for the vitious. The  
 “ sincere and steady practice of virtue is every  
 “ where inculcated by our SAVIOUR and his Apostles, as what only can recommend with  
 “ any advantage to the Divine favour and approbation here, or hereafter.” And consequently to attack the true and genuine doctrine of JESUS CHRIST, is indeed to fight against a belief the most comfortable and beneficial.

\* 'Tis certainly meer enthusiasm, to think that society can subsist without a publick leading in religion. And if the Christian religion

\* See Lord Shaftsbury's *Essay upon Enthusiasm*.



is the best publick one that can be devised, is it friendly to undermine and destroy it? why diminish the obligations to virtue, which at least are the most easily conceived by the vulgar, and are the fittest to work upon those who cannot enquire, or philosophize: but are powerfully struck and over aw'd by the belief of miracles and inspiration.

I have often had it in my head to publish, for the use of modern unbelievers, a dissertation upon the religion of *Cicero*, that I have had by me some time; it is certainly fit to put them in mind, how that Academic examines the various opinions concerning Deity and providence; his way of treating the publick established superstitions in his time; and his sentiments \* of those philosophers who endeavour'd to destroy the belief of immortality and future rewards and punishments, tho' it was no article of the publick religion. *Socrates*, and abundance of other examples, might very seasonably be set before them. For my part, was I an unbeliever, I would look upon myself as obliged to confute such false notions and representations of the Chri-

\* Quod si in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortaleis esse credam, lubenter erro: nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, dum vivo, extorqueri volo: sin mortuus (ut minuti philosophi censent) non vereor ne hunc errorem meum mortui philosophi irrideant. *Cic. de Senect.*

*Polybius, who was certainly one of the best judges of mankind and matters of government, observes, that the belief of a future state is one of the greatest restraints from villany; and therefore speaking politically makes this remark, (I choose to give it in the words of Casaubon's translation) " Idcirco mihi videntur veteres nec temere, nec sine gravi causa istas de Diis opiniones, & de pœnis apud inferos, in vulgus induxisse. Contra autem qui nunc vivunt temere ac sine ratione illas rejicere. " εἰκὴ καὶ ἀλόγως ἐμβάλλειν αὐτὰ. Lib. 6.*



stian doctrine, as tend to the hurt and ruin of true morals, and consequently of society and mankind ; but at the same time to support genuine Christianity to the utmost of my power, for society's sake.

But I believe, and am to give you at present the reason of my belief, for you are curious, it seems, to know at full length, what I meant th'other day when I said, " That the works of " CHRIST were natural proper samples of his " doctrines ; and that I was not a little surprised, none of the Apologists for Christianity " had considered his miracles in that view ; the " connection is so simple, and obvious."

To proceed regularly in this enquiry, one ought to consider, what doctrines may be proved by works ; and what doctrines cannot ; or stand in no need of such a confirmation.

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## S E C T. I.

**B**Eautiful and natural fables, parables, or allegories, are so in themselves independently of any works the teacher may perform. And no works can prove an allegory, parable, or fable, to be natural and elegant, if it is not indeed so : if it's beauty and fitness does not discover itself to every discerning hearer or reader. For would it not be reckoned very odd and ridiculous for a Poet, who happened at the same time to be an able Physician, to appeal to the wonderful cures he performed, to prove his poetry elegant ; or a Painter to prove his painting true and judicious.

'Tis



'Tis therefore evident, that works of the most extraordinary kind, can be of no other use, with regard to fables, allegories, and parables; except to excite the attention of the hearers; to gain authority to the teacher; get him a hearing; and make every body attend with due care; the vulgar especially who stand much in need of instruction in that familiar insinuating way, and yet are not to be moved without an extraordinary awakening.

The parables of our SAVIOUR justify themselves abundantly; nor did he work miracles to prove their propriety and beauty.

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## S E C T. II.

Common sense is certainly sufficient to teach those who think of the matter with tolerable seriousness and attention, all the duties and offices of human life; all our obligations to God; and our fellow-creatures, all that is morally fit and binding. And there is no need of works, to prove that to be morally fit and obligatory, which common sense and reason clearly shews to be so. Nor can any work on the other hand, prove that to be morally fit, and becoming, which common sense and reason proves to be the reverse. The moral fitness or unfitness of actions can only be deduced from the nature of the actions and agents; their constitution, situation, and relations. And therefore works of the most extraordinary nature can be of no further use, with regard to precepts and lessons of morality, except to beget attention, and to make the spectators



Orators and hearers reflect seriously upon that moral fitness, which common sense clearly points out to every thinking person.

But if at any time common sense is quite asleep or buried; or if by the cunning of corrupt designing teachers, false notions of religion and virtue are become universal; and the vulgar especially, who are easily misled by crafty deceivers, can hardly be brought to attend to the wholesome instructions of undebauched pure sense and reason; extraordinary works are certainly fit in such a case; nay almost necessary to give sufficient weight and Authority to a reformer; and to rouse mankind to that attention which is necessary, in order to their being undeceived and soundly instructed. Their eyes must be opened, their sleeping understandings awakened, their prejudices and false notions must be quite rooted out, before truth can enter into their minds with any success, or produce any desired change. And hardly can a task so difficult, be performed by a teacher with no more than ordinary skill or authority.

Such was the condition of mankind in general, of the Jews particularly, when our divine Reformer appeared in the world. And even his extraordinary, marvellous, works, scarcely were sufficient to create attention to the moral doctrines and precepts he taught; which however are evidently in themselves of the most excellent kind: in every respect wholesome, true, just, perfect. He did not work his miracles to prove the moral fitness; the reasonableness and excellency of these; these prove themselves sufficiently: whoever will but attend to them must necessarily



necessarily discover their natural, immutable, eternal truth, and fitness.

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### S E C T. III.

**D**Octrines that can be demonstrated to be worthy of GOD and the divine perfections; and their opposites, or contraries, inconsistent with our natural and just conceptions of GOD and his moral qualities, are necessarily true. Thus, for instance, could it be proved that the immortality of human souls is worthy of GOD; and their mortality inconsistent with the true idea of GOD and the divine perfections; it would follow necessarily, that our souls are immortal; and no works, of whatever kind, could prove that they are mortal. Nor would there be upon that supposition, any need of works to shew that they are immortal. All that any works could do in that case would be, to excite attention to the necessary connexion of that doctrine, with the true notion of GOD and his moral attributes.

The argument holds equally good with regard to the reünion of our souls with bodies, or any other doctrine; supposing that the doctrine could be proved, by necessary consequences, to be worthy of GOD, and it's contrary utterly repugnant to the divine nature and perfections. But however probable and likely these doctrines, of immortality and the reünion of our souls with bodies, may be in themselves, upon several considerations; yet hardly will any one say, that their truth is demonstrable. How these therefore may be proved to be true by works, is to be enquired.

S E C T.



## S E C T. IV.

**B**UT it must also be observed, before we go further; that no works of whatever kind, however surprising or extraordinary, can prove reasonings to be just and conclusive which are evidently false; and solid, accurate reasonings stand firmly upon their own bottom; there is no need of any works to prove that they are so. There are indeed certain reasonings from facts or works; as from experiments, for instance, in physical philosophy. But in that case the facts, works, or experiments are the principles; the premisses, as the schools speak, from which the conclusions are inferred. And therefore with regard to such reasonings, the works may be said to prove the conclusion. But any other kind of reasoning which is offered as complete in itself, distinctly from the works that are produced by the teacher, or in which the conclusion is deduced, not from the works but other principles, must not be judged by the works, but by comparing the conclusion with the principles from which it is drawn, examining first the truth of the principles, and next the connexion betwixt these and the conclusion inferred from them. In short, it is only when the works are the principles, the foundation, upon which the doctrine is built, that works can be taken into the consideration, when the question is about the justness of a reasoning or conclusion.

Thus



Thus when our SAVIOUR reasons with the Jewish doctors concerning the Resurrection, for instance, from this argument that GOD calls himself the \* *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*; and that GOD is not the *God of the dead but of the living*: here is a conclusion drawn from a certain topic, which his works can neither prove to follow, nor not to follow. This and such like reasonings must be judged of by themselves without any regard to his works †.

And now, my friend, you will understand, why t'other day, when I had not leisure to explain my self fully, I said, that in proving the truth of the Christian Religion, "it was necessary to distinguish betwixt the reasonings of our SAVIOUR and his apostles; and their pure simple, positive, doctrines, for the proof of which miracles were wrought ¶." Nothing can be more out of the way, than to say in the general, all the reasonings of our SAVIOUR and his apostles must be good, and all his fables and allegories must be perfectly just and well chosen, because he wrought such and such miracles. The reasonings and the parables †† sufficiently justify and prove themselves. And the miracles only can be compared with these simple positive assertions, or doctrines, to prove the truth of which they were wrought; and which can be inferred from the

\* Matth. xii.

† See Bishop Tillotson's excellent sermon upon that text, in which that reasoning is set in a clear light.

¶ Inter Apostolum & Doctorem, to speak with the learned.

†† One may truly say upon this head; *Wisdom will ever be justified of her children.*



works, as any other conclusion from it's principles.

What should we think of a Mathematician, who pretended to give demonstrations of his propositions; and after all argued thus; That his demonstrations must be just, because he could perform certain extraordinary feats in chymistry or medicine: Or of a moral philosopher, that appealed to such like marvellous productions to prove his moral scheme firmly built, every conclusion just, and the whole system well connected. Whatever was thought of the works to be sure, we would judge of the pretended reasonings and demonstrations by themselves, without regard to the works.

“ One general use however, of the works of  
 “ our SAVIOUR, with regard to the whole of  
 “ his lessons and instructions, is obvious from  
 “ what has been said. They serve to shew he  
 “ was a teacher that deserved to be noticed;  
 “ they were fit to rouse and excite his hearers  
 “ to give due attention to what he taught.”





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## PART II.

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### SECT. I.



UT now it is time to enter into the main question; the connexion betwixt the Works and the Doctrines of JESUS CHRIST.

And in order to conceive distinctly; how, or in what case, works can prove a doctrine to be true; let us attend a little more particularly to the nature of those reasonings just now mentioned, which are deduced from facts, or experiments.

It is by experiment, that the natural philosopher shews the properties of the air, for example, or of any other body. That is, the philosopher shews certain effects which infer certain qualities: or in other words, he shews certain proper samples of the qualities he pretends the air, or any other body that he is reasoning about, hath. Thus is it we know bodies gravitate, attract, that the air is ponderous and elastic. Thus it is, in one word, we come to the knowledge of the properties of any body, and of the general laws of matter and motion. The same way, if a philosopher, a physician, an architect, a painter, or any artist, pretends to a certain



degree of skill or power; he must prove his claim by giving proper samples of that very degree of skill or power he professes. 'Tis by proper samples or experiments only of power and knowledge, that we can be assured, one actually possesses a certain power or knowledge.

Just so it is only by samples or experiments, that we can judge of one's honesty, benevolence, or good intention. We conclude a man honest and worthy of trust and credit, because he has given proof and evidence of his integrity and merit. It is from the works of the Supreme Being, that we infer his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness; as from so many samples and experiments, by which we may safely judge of the whole. 'Tis thus we are satisfied about our own faculties and abilities natural or acquired. 'Tis thus we reason in a thousand instances every day about ourselves and others. It is in one word, from one's works only that we can infer his ability, skill, or power, of any kind or degree, as from proper samples or experiments of that power or quality; in the same way that it is from effects, that we conclude in natural philosophy, that the air, or any body, possesses a certain quality; as from so many proper and analogous samples or experiments of that quality. And it is the same what the power claimed be, of what kind, sort or degree; provided the power claimed be exemplified by proper analogous proportional samples or experiments.

If therefore certain doctrines of JESUS CHRIST evidently are, or can be, reduced to assertions of his having a certain degree of power or knowledge;



knowledge: his works may be a proper proof of these Doctrines; because they may be proper samples or experiments of the power, or knowledge claimed by these assertions. For with regard to such doctrines or assertions, all that can be required by way of proof is, samples analogous in kind, and proportioned in quantity or moment, to the power or knowledge claimed: just as in natural philosophy, or the common reasonings in life every day about the properties and qualities of things, or agents.

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## S E C T. II.

**I**T remains therefore to be considered, what doctrines of our SAVIOUR can be taken in this light; or compared in this manner with his works.

And there are three doctrines of Christianity that are evidently of this kind.

“ The doctrine of future rewards and punishments.

“ The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

“ The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins.”

But before we advance farther it is proper to take notice, that it is evident from what was said before, of the proper proof of any claim to a certain degree of power or knowledge, that

it



it must be the same, whether these three doctrines are reduced to a claim of knowledge or a claim of power. The works will have the same relation to these doctrines, whether they are considered in the one way or the other. For a pretension to knowledge of a certain kind must be proved by samples of that kind ; and a pretension to power of a certain kind must be proved by samples of that kind. The same samples therefore will prove the one, that prove the other, if the power and knowledge are of the same kind.

Either these three doctrines must be considered as a claim to knowledge in this way ;

“ I know certainly that the dead shall be raised.

“ I know certainly that there is a future immortal State of rewards and punishments.

“ I know certainly that sins will be forgiven upon a certain condition.

Or these doctrines must be considered as a claim to power in this way :

“ I have power to raise the dead.

“ I have power to forgive sins.

“ I have power to make happy or miserable in the life to come.”

And which ever way they are taken, the question about the works must come to the same thing.



thing. For in the one case it will be, whether they are samples of the knowledge pretended to; and in the other, whether they are samples of the power pretended to. But the power and knowledge being evidently of the same kind; their objects the same; the works that are of kind with the one, must be of kind with the other.

In which way then are these doctrines to be considered? As a claim to power certainly. For thus our SAVIOUR himself is represented in his history as always declaring these doctrines. "I will raise the dead; that all men may know  
"I have power to forgive sins, &c.

But these three doctrines must be examined severally, and compared with their samples.

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### S E C T. III.

**L**ET us first consider the "Doctrine of the  
"resurrection of the dead."

If our SAVIOUR had said: "I certainly  
"know that the dead shall be raised:" What would have been the proper proof of his having that knowledge? He behoved certainly to have given instances of the possibility of a resurrection from the dead; and of his having that knowledge, by actually raising from the dead. But observe how the doctrine runs; it is not an assertion of knowledge but of power: He does not say; "I know certainly the dead  
"shall be raised." But he asserts his power to  
raise



raise the dead : and always teaches that doctrine in these terms; “ I will raise the dead ; I will “ give eternal life.”

And what is the proper evidence when the claim runs in this strain? The same as in the other case. It was necessary to give samples, or experiments, of this power he claimed. And accordingly he <sup>a</sup> raised from the dead ; and gave power to his Apostles to raise from the <sup>b</sup> dead. And to put his pretensions beyond all doubt, he himself submitted to death, that he might give an incontestible proof of his being actually possessed of that power, by rising himself from the dead <sup>c</sup> the third day, according to his own prediction <sup>d</sup>.

To ask then whether JESUS CHRIST gave a sufficient or proper proof of his having power to raise the dead ; is to ask, whether raising the dead is a sample of power to raise the dead.

All the Objections of certain Sceptics against the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, have been examined and sufficiently answered by Dr *Samuel Clarke* <sup>e</sup>, Mr *Locke* <sup>f</sup>, and others ; to whom I refer you. To say the truth, the difficulties moved against a resurrection from the dead, do not touch that doctrine as it is de-

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xii. 25. Luke vii. 9, &c. John xi. 14, &c. Matth. iii. 24.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. xxviii. Matth. x. 18, &c. Mark xvi.

<sup>c</sup> Mark iii. 15. Luke x. 8, &c. Luke xxiv.

<sup>d</sup> Luke vii. 9, &c. Luke xii. 12, &c. John xx.

<sup>e</sup> See the *Doctor upon the Being and Attributes*.

<sup>f</sup> *Locke's Commentary on the Epistles ; and Dispute with Bishop Stillingfleet.*



livered by our SAVIOUR and his Apostles; but the chimerical additions to it of some Divines; who imagine the same particles of matter, which were united with the soul when it acted the bad or the good part, must likewise be sharers in the rewards or the punishments; forgetting their own principle, the immateriality of our thinking part, and that matter is utterly insensible; nay incapable of being made, even by the Deity himself, to think, feel, or perceive.

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#### S E C T. IV.

**B**UT our SAVIOUR not only asserted his power \* to raise from the dead: but to give us immortal, incorruptible † bodies and to make perfectly happy, or compleatly miserable in the life to come.

And who are to be happy, and who are to be miserable, according to his doctrine? The virtuous and regular are to be rewarded; the vicious and immoral are to be punished. Every one is to be judged by his works, by his conduct, and approved or condemned accordingly.

Instinct, Reason, and the universal consent of all nations and ages of the world, conjoin to render this doctrine probable, which our SAVIOUR has set beyond all doubt, by the samples he gave of his power to bestow blessings, or inflict miseries of every sort. Consider but his works in this light; and were they not all so many experiments or instances of this power? he made the

\* John v. 20, &c.

† 1 Cor. xv.



ignorant and simple wife in a moment: changed the tempers and dispositions of men almost instantaneously: cured the most malign, inveterate, diseases by a word of his mouth: delivered in the same instantaneous, wonderful, manner, from infirmities of every kind: and bestowed upon whom he pleased, the most marvellous and surprizing gifts and talents\*. His transfiguration was a plain specimen and example of the glory and lustre he could give to our bodies after the resurrection. And all his works, in one word, were one continued series of proper and analogous experiments, to prove his power to curse or bless; banish diseases and infirmities; bestow blessings of every kind, moral or corporeal: make happy; compleatly happy, or compleatly wretched.

\* Matth. xiv. 25, &c. Mark iv. 40, &c. Matth. ix 35, &c. Matth. xiv. 14, &c. Matth. xii 25, &c. Matth. xv. 21, &c. Matth. xx. 35, &c. Matth. xxi. 14, &c. Luke xii. 12, &c. Luke x. 8, &c. Mark iii. 15.

## S E C T. V.

**O**UR SAVIOUR † also taught the forgiveness of sins. And how did he prove his pretension to this power? By these very experiments and samples that he gave of his power to deliver from miseries, and render happy. For what is it to forgive sins? is it not to deliver from those miseries sin justly merits; or to which it renders the sinner obnoxious?

And accordingly he asserted his power to forgive sins: but that all men might know he had

† Matth. xxviii. Mark xvi. Luke xxiv. John xx.

indeed



indeed that power; he ordered the lame, whose sins he pronounced remitted and forgiven, to arise take up the couch and walk. † The dumb spoke; the deaf heard; the lame walked strait and firmly: he cured all diseases; and bestowed health, strength, and all sorts of blessings: at his command also the dead arose; to prove that he could forgive sins, or deliver the penitent from all the pains and miseries his sinful life had righteously deserved.

Let us take notice however, how cautious he was of giving any encouragement to the wicked, by his doctrine of the forgiveness of sins ‖. It was only to those who seriously repented and reformed, that he gave the agreeable hopes of finding pardon. It was not to such as continued in their sins, in spite of frequent Remorses and professions of repentance: but to such as really turned to the love and practice of virtue; and sincerely forsook their wicked ways, in the habitual course of their lives and practice.

And therefore we find that where there was no Faith, he refused to work cures. Where there was no Faith: that is, where he found not that sincere, unprejudiced; that pliable, docile temper, that is necessary in order to reformation, or receiving wholesome instruction: but on the contrary, obstinacy, stubbornness, malignity of disposition, and every bad quality. That this is the meaning is plain, because he upbraids them for their malice and blind obstinacy; the hardness of their hearts; and calls them children of

† Matth. ix. 5, &c. Mark ii. 10. Luke v. 20, &c. Mark xiii. 11, &c.

‖ Matth. xiii. 58, &c.



the Devil sometimes; a phrase that sounds harsh in our tongue; but is well known by those who are skill'd in the original languages, to mean no more, but that they hated the light and loved darkness, because their works were evil, as he himself speaks at other times.

Thus in the whole of his conduct, he carefully shunned, by a promiscuous bestowal of his favours and blessings, to give any handle to the most terrible, pernicious abuse of his doctrine concerning the forgiveness of sins; as if in consequence of it, *men might sin that grace might the more abound* †. And at the same time gave full assurance of his power to deliver sincere reformers, from the just demerits of their former evil practices; if an infinity of instances of power to deliver from all sorts of pains and miseries, and to confer all kinds of blessings, are proper and adequate samples of a power to curse and bless, make happy or miserable.

† Luke vii. 9, &c. Luke x. 9, &c. John xi. 14, &c.  
Matth. x. 19, &c. Matth. viii. 42, &c.

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## S E C T. VI.

**A**DD to these three, the promise of assistance to all those who being convinced of the truth of our SAVIOUR's doctrine and pretension; seriously set themselves to reform every evil habit; and to improve daily in virtue and goodness.

It was necessary that the Apostles, who were, after our SAVIOUR's ascension, to preach and promulgate his doctrine, should have an extraordinary



ordinary assistance\* ; the gift of tongues ; the power of healing diseases ; and of raising from the dead. And accordingly we have already seen that all necessary power and assistance was actually given to them. So that the effusion of gifts upon them at *Pentecoste* ; their bold and undaunted perseverance in spight of all opposition ; their heroic sufferings ; and all the extraordinary works they performed ; were an infrangible proof and confirmation of our SAVIOUR's ability to bestow every virtue, every quality, every degree of power : and at the same time of his veracity and faithfulness, that he would not fail to fulfil all that he had promised. And consequently were an indisputable argument of the truth of all his doctrines ; of his whole claim. A proper proof in particular of his being able to give the assistance he hath promised to Christians.

† He proffers his spirit to them who ask it. He hath said that if Christians are not remiss and slothful, but give all due pains on their part ; that their endeavours shall be successful ; that they should feel their irregular appetites and passions weaken apace ; and the good ones gain new life and vigour every day. And more especially that they should find proper aid in time of trial ; an extraordinary assistance to counterbalance the extraordinary attacks their virtue might suffer in certain circumstances from the side of pleasure and it's enchantments ; or distress and it's terrors. And seeing he accom-

\* See the texts already cited. And the whole history of the Acts of the Apostles is full of samples and proofs to this purpose.

† He hath promised in innumerable places to Give his Spirit to those who ask it.



plished to the full, what he promised to his Apostles; why should we doubt of his ability, or good-will to do all he undertook? He who did the greater, can he not, will he not, do the less? In short, all the courage, wisdom, sincerity, and steadiness of the Apostles; all their gifts, talents, and works, are, in the nature of things, the fittest *Specimens* that can possibly be imagined, of our SAVIOUR's capacity to make good all he promised. And that no distance of time or place could make any difference, or alteration, with regard to his will or power. Samples of power to bestow a certain quality, or blessing, are certainly a proof of power to bestow it.

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## S E C T. VII.

**I** Have not time to give you an exact history or detail of the works of our SAVIOUR recorded in the gospels; nor is it necessary: after these hints it will be easy, in reading over the gospels, to refer the works narrated there, to these doctrines.

But, says a noble author\*, “ Signs of power may prove power, but cannot prove honesty, or create trust.

And to say the Truth, it was this way of speaking about miracles, that first gave me the hint of considering the miracles of our SAVIOUR as samples of his pretended power. But in answer

\* *The Earl of Shaftsbury somewhere in his Moral Rhapsody.*



to this, let us consider how honesty and good intention can only be ascertained. To be sure it must shew itself by an uniform untainted conduct and behaviour; by a continued course of honest and benevolent deeds; by a series uninterrupted of samples of goodness and sincerity. And was not the whole of our SAVIOUR's conduct the fittest that can be imagined to gain him credit in this way? what ground did he ever give to suspect his fidelity, or call his truth and honesty in question? Were not these very works †, that proved his power at the same time, so many irrefragable evidences of his goodness, sincerity, and benevolent honest intention? It was necessary to give some examples of his power to curse as well as to bless. For such is the nature of the common herd of mankind, that one instance of suffering makes more impression upon their weak and fearful minds, than a thousand examples of happiness. But he chose to shew his power to inflict pains and miseries to blast and curse by such examples as might serve the purpose sufficiently, and yet do very little mischief: as in cursing the fig-tree ‖, and sending the Devils into the swine \*. He delighted not in cursing, but in blessing; he rejoiced in works of mercy and benevolence; and went about continually doing good. But there is the less reason to insist upon this article, that even those who have called him an impostor never adventured to

† I need not put you in mind upon this head, that by Devils are to be understood violent terrible maladies; for that has often been made plain, and is now, I believe, generally agreed on. And I shall be obliged to treat of that affair at more length in the second part of this Enquiry; when I come to consider the facts, and their evidence.

‖ Matth. iv. 19. Mark xi. 14, &c. \* Mark v. 13, &c.  
charge



charge him with malice, or any bad mischievous design: but on the contrary, have been obliged to acknowledge, that he gave all the possible marks of a good, generous, and well-disposed Teacher of the soundest morals.

In judging however of our SAVIOUR's pretension; his conduct, and the evidences that he gave of his honesty, and sincere good disposition, must certainly be taken into the account. He himself tells his disciples, that they were not to trust to miracles only; because not only might false teachers *work miracles*, but there should actually come after him *false Christs* †, false prophets, working miracles; but that, together with the miracles they were to consider the doctrine and the conduct of pretended extraordinary Teachers: to judge of the *tree by it's fruit* ||.

† Math. xxiv. 24. Mark xiii. 22. || Matth. xii. 33.

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## S E C T. VIII.

**B**UT having considered the samples JESUS CHRIST gave of the power he claimed by his doctrines: it must be observed next, that he pretended to a divine commission to teach these doctrines: and by them to encourage and excite to the practice of virtue, and to discourage sin and vice.

And with regard to his pretended mission; it is evident, that if the particular doctrines, that is, the particular assertions of power, are sufficiently justified and proved by proper samples; the truth of the mission follows in course.

For



For what reason can there possibly be to doubt of the mission, when the particular power the missionary claims, as missionary, is sufficiently ascertained by proper samples?

But besides, the whole series of the miracles of JESUS CHRIST may be justly considered as one continued proof of the general pretension to a mission: as one continued proof that, as he asserted, all power \* was given unto him of GOD who sent him. For by his works he shewed, that he had an universal command of nature: a power that nothing could controul. † The seas, the winds, all the elements, every thing above or below obeyed his all-commanding voice. His works therefore in this case are still proper adequate samples.

In fine, a divine mission can be nothing else, but a certain degree of power or knowledge given of GOD; or ordered by GOD to be exerted for a certain end: such as the “ascertaining the truth of certain doctrines.” And therefore samples or experiments of power and knowledge analagous to the doctrines preached: or to the power and knowledge claimed; and proportioned likewise in quantity or number; are a proper proof of a divine mission; if power or knowledge can in any case be evidenced by samples, or experiments. And sure, as has been said, there can be no other way of shewing power, or knowledge, but by giving certain specimens of it.

But to leave no room for doubt or scepticism, let us enquire yet more particularly what is necessary to prove a mission.

\* Mark iv. 39, &c.

† Ibid. vi. 11.



And when one pretends to a mission, there are three things requisite to compleat his credentials. “ The doctrines he teaches must be  
 “ of importance; such as it concerns mankind  
 “ much to be assured of; and have an evident  
 “ connexion with our peace and happiness, and  
 “ tendency to promote virtue and piety.”

And such certainly are the doctrines which JESUS CHRIST taught: they are such as the wise in all ages have earnestly wished to be assured of by a proper evidence. They are, in one word, the only doctrines that have any connexion with virtue \* and piety; or the happiness of mankind, which natural reason is in the dark about, and cannot ascertain beyond all doubt.

“ Next the missionary must behave himself in  
 “ such a manner, as that we may have sufficient  
 “ reason, from his conduct, to trust and put  
 “ full confidence in him.”

And such certainly was the whole of our SAVIOUR’s conduct and behaviour; that either we may safely rely upon his word, and believe in his honesty; or no marks, no samples of goodness, sincerity, and faithfulness, are sufficient to create trust.

“ Last of all, the pretended missionary must  
 “ give a proper and full evidence, that he  
 “ really is possessed of any degree of power he  
 “ claims; and of the knowledge that is necessa-

\* *Well might our Saviour say,* That such who know the will of GOD, and do it; must own and acknowledge his doctrines to be of GOD.



“ry to render him capable of ascertaining these  
“doctrines to us which he asserts and teaches.”

And have we not already found that he gave proper and adequate samples of the power he claimed by his doctrines? and do not all his works shew that universal knowledge of nature, and the government of the world; which is sufficient to put his capacity to teach us the doctrines he taught beyond all controversy? Who is sufficient to instruct us, if he who gave samples of such extraordinary knowledge was not? What greater degree of knowledge can we require in an instructor; or what other samples of the knowledge requisite to instruct us? consider him as pretending to come from God, to tell us that he had power given unto him of God *to raise the dead* †, *to forgive sins*, and to make the virtuous happy, and the wicked miserable, in the life to come. And as this was indeed his pretension; so we have already seen that his works were proper and proportioned samples of his right to claim such power. Consider him as pretending to come from God, to teach mankind that there will be a future state, and a resurrection of the dead; and that those who repent and reform their lives, will be forgiven and made happy in a future life; but that the impenitent, and such as continue to lead vicious and disorderly lives, will be punished in that after-life. And still his works are proper and adequate experiments, that he had the knowledge requisite to give us this information. For he shewed that the dead could be raised; that he knew how to raise the dead; and could

† John v. 19, &c. Matth. xi. 27.



actually raise them ; that he could make happy or miserable in any degree ; that he could forgive sins ; or give full and compleat evidence when sins were forgiven ; because he could deliver those whose sins he pronounced forgiven, from any sorts of pains or miseries, to which sin renders obnoxious. In like manner he proffers assistance to the virtuous ; and at the same time shewed his ability to confer every good quality when at a distance, as well as when present.

To conclude, if we abstract from the history of our SAVIOUR, and inquire with our selves what would be a full and compleat evidence of a mission from GOD to teach ; it is not difficult to find out what the evidence must be. For we know what doctrines of importance, with regard to GOD and ourselves, natural reason is not able to satisfy us fully about.

We have so much knowledge of GOD, as to be able to determine what doctrines he would instruct us in, by an extraordinary missionary ; if he should ever condescend to teach us in that manner. These very doctrines to be sure, which have a connexion with virtue and piety, that natural reason is not able to deduce certainly from any principles ; and such are the doctrines which JESUS CHRIST taught. And as for what regards testimony, we all know the evidence that is requisite to render it credible and worthy of our reception. All, to be sure, that can be demanded is, that there be good ground to trust our informer as to his honesty ; and next, that he give sufficient samples of the kind of knowledge he pretends to, or that is necessary in order to his giving us such and such information :  
samples



samples analogous in kind, and proportioned to the degree of knowledge he claims, by pretending to inform us of certain truths. We must reason concerning the proper credentials, or evidence of testimony, in every case the same way : in this just as in any other.

Having therefore shewed that our SAVIOUR gave samples of his sincerity and honest design ; and at the same time adequate samples of the power and knowledge he pretended to ; it follows necessarily, that there is all the reason in the world to believe in him, and give him full credit.

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### S E C T. VIII.

**A**ND is this then, perhaps you'll say, the whole of Christianity ? Yes it is ; and a noble and perfect system indeed it is, containing all the encouragements that can be thought of, or desired, to virtue, piety, and goodness, the love of GOD and our fellow-creatures ; which common reason sufficiently tells us, if we would but hearken to it's dictates, is the whole duty of man.

These doctrines above explained are clearly insisted upon by our SAVIOUR and his Apostles ||. These doctrines are ever and ever insisted upon by them, as the chief ; as the only doctrines of consequence they had to instruct us in †. These doctrines

|| John v. 2. —vi. 38, 44. —xiii. 44. —xiv. 33. Acts ii. 29. —iii. 26. —iv. 10. —x. 42. —xviii. 30.  
† Cor. xv.

† See the texts cited in the foregoing pages.



are ever inculcated by them, as motives to the practice of virtue. These are the doctrines the best of the ancient philosophers, would have rejoiced to have found sufficient evidence to believe. And these doctrines being ascertained, we are fully instructed in every thing that relates to virtue, or this life, or the life to come, that it concerns us to know. Had I not then good reason to say in the beginning of this letter, my friend, " That the doctrine of a future state is the sum of Christianity." For the doctrines abovementioned are easily reducible to this one proposition, " That the vicious are to be punished in the life to come; and the virtuous to be assisted in their serious endeavours here; and made perfect in virtue and happiness hereafter." With this single additional circumstance, " That after our souls have been for some time separated from their bodies, they are to be again embodied." There is nothing in the christian doctrine that has not a relation to a future state, as it's main end and scope\*. And consequently to fight against Christianity, is to fight against a belief the most chearing and comfortable; the most strong and powerful persuasive to a virtuous and good conversation.

There are several obscure places, especially in the epistles of the Apostles, about the interpretation of which the learned Criticks and Divines have been much divided in all the after-ages of Christianity. But that is argument enough,

\* *The Apostles in all their discourses, and the Fathers in all their apologies, insist upon the resurrection as the principal doctrine of Christianity: the great end and purpose of christian preaching.*

that



that Christians are not obliged to know their meaning. That can never be said to be revealed, which is not made plain; or which remains liable to various and uncertain interpretation. Our salvation cannot possibly depend upon that which it is difficult, not to say impossible, even for much learning to determine. Not to mention that common sense and reason tells plainly and indisputably, that it is only virtue and goodness that can recommend, or make acceptable to GOD, who is all virtue, all reason, all goodness. And indeed to imagine otherwise, is to suppose that the most useful quality is not the most valuable: or that GOD, who is infinite wisdom, doth not delight most in that which is of all other qualities the most excellent and deserving\*.

We are called by JESUS CHRIST to believe in him: that is, to believe he really had a mission to inculcate virtue by these doctrines he taught; and really had the power he claimed by these doctrines: that thus believing in him we might fall in love with virtue, and seek earnestly for glory, honour, and immortality, by a sincere and firm adherence to virtue, in spite of all temptations and seducements. To believe in him is nothing else than to believe the authority he had to excite to virtue and piety by his doctrines; his power to forgive sins and raise the dead; and to assist and prosper our earnest aims in the pursuit and study of virtue. And this faith can be of no value or merit, unless it

*\* If there is a GOD; and that there is, all nature cries aloud, he must delight in virtue. Virtue is the perfection of the human nature.*

produces



produces good fruits ; unless the end of his teaching is gained, which is to persuade to live a natural, manly, and virtuous life ; in every circumstance to behave as becometh a thinking, reasonable being ; to love GOD ; and, like him, to delight in doing good. Without such works faith is dead †.

A great many questions are asked and disputed, about the state of those who have not heard of CHRIST. But the answer to them all is obvious. Those who have not heard of CHRIST, cannot believe : but those have yet a law within themselves, teaching them their duty ; the duty CHRIST taught ; the whole duty of man ||.

That the doctrine of CHRIST however is not more generally known throughout the world, is the fault of Christians, who take not the right method to propagate it ; but have, the greater part, ever done their utmost, either foolishly or wickedly, to marr it's progress. The Christian Religion can only be propagated in the rational way of argument and persuasion ; and it is the integrity and purity of the lives of professing christians ; and their moderation and humanity towards unbelievers, that ever will have the greatest influence to recommend Christianity, and promote the belief and love of it. The temper and spirit which true and genuine Christianity inspires, is a spirit of meekness and gentleness, charity and compassion ; *slow to \* wrath ; ready to forgive ; prompt to good works.* And

† James iii. 20. || *This is the Apostle Paul's account of the matter, Rom. ii.*

\* James iv. 1 Cor. xiii.



where this temper is not found, there is not the same spirit that was in CHRIST and his Apostles; nor the disposition that only can render agreeable to GOD who sent him into the world to teach humility, and benevolence, and to reprove every vicious affection; to exemplify all the moral virtues in his life and conduct; as well as to give the strongest inducements to the practice of them by his doctrines.

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### S E C T. IX.

**B**UT by this time, my friend, I am afraid you begin to dread a sermon. And therefore to return to the argument :

If it is allowed, as it must certainly be, that the doctrines so often repeated are the chief doctrines of Christianity; Christianity carries the same evidence along with it, that any doctrine does, which is confirmed by the plainest, the most proper, or analogous experiments.

“ The works of JESUS CHRIST considered  
 “ as samples of the power he claimed, are not  
 “ *Disperates*, with regard to his doctrines, as  
 “ *Spinoza* alledges miracles must be with regard  
 “ to doctrines.”

It is true, miracles, when considered in a general abstract view, do not appear to have any relation to doctrines: nothing at first sight can seem more distinct or remote the one from the other. And therefore it is commonly objected against the proof offered from miracles: what can miracles have to do in the case; miracles

F

may



may prove power; but what is that to the truth of doctrines? But take the doctrines and the works of CHRIST, and compare them together; and the relation and connexion is obvious. Samples of power to raise the dead, prove the power to raise the dead: and samples of power to make happy, prove the power to make happy: in the same way that samples of gravity prove gravity; or samples of elasticity prove elasticity; or that samples of skill in any sort, prove skill of that sort. There is the same relation, in one word, betwixt the doctrines of JESUS CHRIST and his works, that there is betwixt any experiment, and the conclusion that naturally follows from it.

“ Nor are the works of JESUS CHRIST arguments *ad ignorantiam*, (as the same author says) miracles must ever be.” For the works of JESUS CHRIST, however much above our comprehension, bear a plain relation to his doctrines; and it is only the truth of the facts or samples, and their relation to the doctrine, that we are concerned to understand. That can never be said to be a proof *ad ignorantiam*, the connexion of which with the thing proved, or the conclusion inferred, is clearly perceived.

The works of JESUS CHRIST are not arguments of power, we know not what: they are arguments of the very power he pretended to; because samples of that very power. Arguments of his power to raise the dead; forgive sins; make happy or miserable. Arguments of an universal knowledge of nature; and unlimited authority over all things; arguments, in short,  
of



of the whole of his pretension ; because samples of all he pretended to.

Tho' we understand not the nature of that power which raises the dead ; tho' the raising the dead be a work above our ability and comprehension ; yet a sample of power to raise the dead, proves that power ; and the connexion betwixt the sample and the power pretended to is not above our comprehension, but is easily understood. Attraction, say all the philosophers, is above our comprehension : they cannot explain how bodies attract : but experience or samples certainly prove that there is attraction. And proper experiments or samples, must equally prove the power of raising the dead, tho' we do not understand, or cannot explain, that power.

But because there is so much controversy about that common distinction betwixt things above our reason, and things contrary to our reason, it may not be amiss, on this occasion to say something about it.

And an example taken from natural philosophy will soon clear the matter : Attraction can only be known by experience, and samples abundantly prove it. But it is above our reason or comprehension ? What is the meaning of that ? why it is only to say, that a thousand questions may be ask'd about it, to which no answer can be given ; because we know not enough about it, to answer them. We know that it is ; and some of the laws according to which it produces it's effects : And that is all we know of it. And our not being able to give satisfying answers to



other questions, that may be asked about it, only proves that there is a great deal relating to it, we do not know.

In the same manner a thousand questions may be ask'd about raising the dead, which we can't answer. A sample however proves the possibility: and many samples as certainly prove the power to raise the dead; as samples of attraction prove attraction. Nor indeed can the power of raising the dead, be said to be above our comprehension in any sense, that attraction, and twenty other properties of bodies, may not be said to be above our comprehension. What we clearly see to be absurd, we clearly see to be so; but there is a great difference betwixt seeing a thing to be absurd, and not knowing every thing that belongs to it; or not being able to answer every question that may be asked concerning it. Some seem however to confound insolvable questions about a truth, with insolvable or invincible objections against a truth. And because there may be difficult, nay unanswerable, questions relating to a known truth; maintain there may be insolvable objections against a known truth. But \* an insolvable objection against a truth, is an argument *ad absurdum* against a truth, or a proof that a known truth cannot possibly be true. Those who delight in sophistry and grubbing, may perplex the ignorant or incautious: and no science has escaped this puzzling, perplexing art. But by a fatal calamity, none has suffer'd more than Divinity. Yet when the artful terms of the schools, intro-

\* It is worth while to read a discourse of Mr Leibnitz, de Fide & Ratione, in which this question is handled.



duced on purpose to darken and embroil the clearest truths, and to be an everlasting source of controversy and wrangling; when all artful, captious, equivocal terms are thrown aside; and truths are expressed in common, simple, plain language, the sophistry is easily seen thro', and it's mists evanish \*.

This way of considering the works of JESUS CHRIST, as samples of his doctrines, makes the connexion betwixt his works and his doctrines obvious to every capacity. Because we all reason in this way every day, about a thousand different things: thus the meanest labourer of the ground, or poorest mechanick, must argue frequently: we judge of friends and enemies by samples; by samples and experiments, in short, almost all our affairs in life are regulated. And therefore in this way of handling the question concerning the connexion betwixt the works and the doctrines of our SAVIOUR, I can't be blamed for having talked so much of miracles hitherto, without giving a definition of them. Because taking the miracles of JESUS CHRIST in this view, nothing more is necessary than to consider them as certain works that shewed such and such power.

It does not belong in the least, to the question, whether these works are above, or contrary to, the established laws of nature; whether superior to human power, as they plainly are; or whether above the power of all created

\* *Pray look into an incomparable Dissertation by Werin-felsius, Professor of Theology at Basil, de Logomachiis Eruditorum.*



agents. But only what they were ; and what power they were samples or experiments of. And of this any body may judge ; the relation and connexion is so conspicuous and glaring.

The only thing I fear, my friend, is, that you think I have been too tedious ; and have taken too much pains to make a connexion evident, that is obvious at first sight. For what can be more clear than what I have been so long insisting upon ? “ That he who shews by experiments and samples, that he has a certain degree of power ; really shews that he has that power. And that he who shews by a long train of honesty and goodness, that he is good, and honest, and worthy of trust ; really shews that he is good, and honest, and worthy of trust.”

Nor would I have dwelt so long upon this argument ; had ever the works of our SAVIOUR been considered in this light, by any writer upon the subject that I have seen.



PART



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## P A R T III.

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### S E C T. I.



Would not however be understood, my friend, as if there was no other way of reasoning from the works of JESUS CHRIST, to prove the truth of the religion he taught. On the contrary, there is another argument which to me seems beyond all exception. It runs thus:

“ A great number of works that shew a  
 “ power superior to human power, and to the  
 “ established laws of nature which limit human  
 “ power ; when produced by a preacher of  
 “ good doctrines, as signs of the divine appro-  
 “ bation ; upon a solemn appeal to GOD for  
 “ these signs of his approbation : are the most  
 “ natural signs of the divine approbation we  
 “ can conceive.

“ And it is inconsistent with the idea of the  
 “ divine wisdom, and with the order that must  
 “ obtain in the moral, as well as the natural  
 “ world ; in consequence of a divine provi-  
 “ dence ; to suppose that such works could be  
 “ produced by an impostor. For in that case  
 “ the most likely and natural tokens of divine  
 “ approbation, we can form any notion of,  
 would



“ would accompany a presumptive, deceiving  
 “ pretender; and thus a cheat would be attended  
 “ with the natural and probable marks of truth.”

This argument, I think, must hold good; because it is not so difficult a matter to determine what works shew a power superior to human power, and the laws of nature. Experience teaches clearly certain established uniform laws of nature which we cannot controul, alter, or suspend. “ To raise the dead; and cure  
 “ diseases by a word of our mouth, are, for  
 “ example, evidently works of that *kind*.”

And tho’ we know not the spheres of activity of other beings; the laws which limit their faculties: nor, in one word, what degrees of power created beings, superior to mankind may possess; and consequently know not what works GOD alone can produce: yet knowing what works are superior to human power; and that these works are wrought by a preacher of good doctrines, as signs of the divine approbation, upon a solemn appeal to the divine approbation; we must conclude, that such a preacher really has the divine mission he pretends to. Or we must say, that such works produced in such a manner, are not proper signs of the divine approbation. And at the same time it is certainly impossible to conceive more likely signs of the divine approbation; or how indeed the divine approbation can possibly shew itself, but by such signs upon an appeal to GOD by the preacher for his approbation.

It is justly added to this reasoning, by way of a corroborative adjunct, that a being of a malignant



nant disposition, would never exert it's power to preach and excite to virtue and piety; nor one of a good disposition to deceive, and thus our SAVIOUR himself argues concerning his doctrine and mission. \*

But this argument has been so fully and elegantly displayed in all it's force, by several authors, (Dr *Samuel Clarke* † particularly, and the Bishop of *Salisbury* ‡) that there is no occasion for dwelling longer upon it. Only because I fancy the considering the works of JESUS CHRIST as samples, adds no inconsiderable force to it; it may not be improper, to take a short view of it in all it's strength, when this additional consideration is taken into the reckoning. That thus we may have a full view how far the considering the works of CHRIST as samples reaches.

\* Mark iii. 25, &c.

† *Demonstration of the Being, &c.*

Part II.

‡ See *Hoadley's Tracts*. See *Grotius de Veritate, &c.*

## S E C T. II.

IT consists then of two propositions to be examined separately.

“The moral world would be irregular and disorderly; if things were not so ordered, that the most natural and likely signs or marks of the divine mission and approbation, should never accompany an impostor.

“But signs of power superior to human power, which are proper and adequate sam-



“ples, of the power claimed as a divine messenger, when produced in great numbers and unfailingly, by a preacher of doctrines in themselves good and probable; as signs of the divine mission and approbation, are the most natural and likely signs we can conceive of the divine mission and approbation.”

If these two propositions are true it must follow, because such were the works of CHRIST, that he is not an impostor, but really sent of God.

### S E C T. III.

**T**HE idea of order, wisdom, and providence, necessarily infers the truth of the first: “That the proper marks of the divine approbation cannot accompany an impostor.” For what could produce greater confusion or disorder in the moral world, than the contrary permission. And on the other hand, the restraint upon the powers and faculties of beings superior to man, which such oeconomy in the government of intelligent agents supposes, cannot possibly have any bad effect. And, in one word, we must either conclude, that there is such a restraint, and such a law in the government of the moral world: or we must suppose it impossible for God, in consequence of his own administration, to instruct mankind by a mission. 'Tis to no purpose to say, that we can't reason about what may, or may not be permitted, because sins and errors of the grossest kinds are permitted. For there is a manifest difference betwixt permitting free agents to misuse



use their liberty, and commit sins, which they themselves, and all other intelligent beings, know to be sins ; or permitting errors to prevail, which all rational beings may clearly see to be such ; who will but open their eyes, to consider and examine them : And permitting the criterions and marks of truth to be confounded with those of falsehood ; the most likely and natural signs and tokens of the divine mission, and approbation to accompany and attest an impostor. In the one case, free agents are not restrained by an overpowering preternatural force, from exerting their natural powers and faculties in a free choice or election. But sin and vice remain essentially and immutably distinguishable. In the other, truth and error are confounded ; imposture and presumptuous falsehood carries away with it the proper marks of the divine authority and approbation. And can we suppose God to look on inactive, and see his authority trifled with, nay trampled upon, and prostituted.

In fine observe the laws in the natural world, and the order and harmony that results from the steady, uniform observance of them ; and judge whether it is not likely, that equal order and regularity must prevail in the moral. But how can it be so, if it is not an established law in the moral world, that whatever the powers of any beings are, the evidences of truth should never accompany an impostor ! Balance the inconveniencies that must follow, if there was no such rule ; with the consequences of such a rule ; and it will be no difficult matter to see on which side the probability lies.



But that there is such a law, is a plain consequence from the divine veracity. “ And that “ God is truth, all nature cries aloud.”

’Tis the full and perfect knowledge of truth, order, and beauty; together with the unchangeable love of it; and power incontrollable to execute his design, that render a being all perfect. And because the whole of things, as far as we can trace it, is an uniform, consistent system, in which truth, harmony, and proportion, are exactly observed; and in which all works towards the general good; justly may we conclude, that the author of it is a God of truth and order; infinitely wise and good; as well as almighty. And that the further we are able to pry into his government, by all our searching, the more we shall be charmed with it’s beauty, goodness, and perfection. And to suppose God acting inconsistently, or departing from truth and order: infinite truth and wisdom having recourse to chicanery and fraud; and acting the impostor; is a contradiction in terms. And what can possibly be called acting contrary to truth; or using fraudulent, deceitful measures; if giving all the marks of approbation, favour, and protection, to a *lying deceiver*, that can be given to a *Divine Mission*, is not really so?

S E C T.



## S E C T. IV.

“**T**HAT works which shew a power superior to that of mankind; and to the  
 “ established laws of nature; and are samples  
 “ of the very power claimed; when produced  
 “ by a preacher of good and wholesome doctrines to prove his mission; are proper signs  
 “ of a divine mission, is likewise certain.”

Mankind in all ages hath had that notion; that if God did ever reveal himself; or shew his approbation of any extraordinary teacher, it would be by such signs of power as above described. *That is, by\* miracles.* And therefore if an argument can be fetch'd in any case, from the universal consent and opinion of mankind, it may in this.

Besides, if a being preaches good doctrines, and gives all evidences of piety and sincerity, there can be no ground to suspect such a being of claiming a mission, that he is not really invested with. Is it probable, that any being of an order superior to mankind, would run the risque of being baffled in his pretension to a divine mission? And every such being must necessarily be supposed to know, as well as we, that God hath power supreme, infinitely above

\* *This is evident from the conduct of antient politicians, who to give the more authority to their laws and institutions, pretended to inspiration; or an extraordinary intercourse with some revered Deity, or heavenly being, &c.*



all created power: And that he can easily oppose and ruin such a claim: which if it is not true, such a being must likewise very well know to be most presumptive and impious. Is it not then more likely that any being who can be supposed to teach good doctrines; and produce extraordinary works to confirm them; if he had no mission, would pretend to none; but merely seek his own honour and glory, by the works he wrought and the doctrines he taught? And thus, if I am not mistaken, our SAVIOUR himself reasons to prove his mission. “ I came not, *saieth he*, to seek mine own honour; but “ the glory of him who sent me.”

And therefore so far am I from thinking, that the divine mission and approbation is not proved, if claimed, when all the circumstances already described concur: that is, when the doctrines are good in their tendency; the preacher gives indisputable evidence of sincerity and good intention; the signs shew power superior to human power, and to the laws of nature; and are samples of the power claimed and the doctrines asserted; that on the contrary, I should rather imagine, that the only small ground of suspicion, in case of such teaching, would be, if a divine mission was not claimed; and if the preacher ascribed all to his own generosity and benevolence towards mankind, without pretending to any divine order or mission. And yet even in that case there would be no sufficient reason to reject such instruction. Because samples of power necessarily prove that power of which they are samples: and marks of sincerity must needs be deemed marks of sincerity. And if a teacher has all the power and knowledge that is requisite,



requisite, in order to the giving us certain information : and at the same time gives sufficient evidence of his honesty and candor ; there can be no ground to mistrust him.

But further, if the doctrines preached are not consistent with our natural notions of God and virtue ; or if the conduct of the preacher is not suitable to the claim of a divine mission ; whatever the works are, we have good reason to conclude, that there is no mission. In that case the cheat is manifest. Common sense may easily see through the mask, and discern the imposture.

And if there is no criterion, no certain mark neither in the doctrines themselves, nor the works, nor the behaviour of the preacher, by which the falshood of the claim can be known : God being superior to all created agents, can easily refute and baffle the daring, impudent pretender.

And therefore when the conduct of the preacher, and the doctrines themselves are in every respect consistent with our justest notions of God and virtue ; signs of power superior to the laws of nature, which are samples of the power claimed, and of the doctrines taught ; must be held as signs of the divine approbation, to prove which they are produced without any controul. Such works are justly assignable, if not to the immediate hand and operation of God himself, at least to his order and mission. Nor can any shadow of reason be alleged why they are not : no circumstance being wanting in them that could render any works more so. At least  
it



it must be said, that in such a case God refuses not his approbation, because he does not check or contradict the pretender. And in such circumstances we may safely argue, "That approbation not refused is given:" for it is only the refusal by thwarting or opposing the pretender, that can evidence it's not being granted. Nay, when these very signs of supernatural power, which God is called upon by the preacher to produce, or allow to be produced, to vouch his authority and mission, are actually produced; God, by these signs, if they are likewise samples of the very power claimed, declares, speaks aloud, as it were, his consent and approbation. He gives the properest samples and tokens of it, that we are able to form any notion of.

Because it is by certain supernatural appearances or signs, that the divine mission must be declared and sealed. And to us who know not the boundaries of created power, "Any supernatural effects which have all the characteristics again and again defined, are as fit and proper signs of the divine mission, as any supernatural signs whatever can be." They have all the marks and characters of such signs that can be required, or indeed conceived.

Such appearances, or works, demonstrate the approbation of some being superior to man, and to the laws of nature. They are marks of such an approbation, because they are marks and samples of such a power. The question therefore is only, whether they are marks of the divine approbation. And they are marks and samples of it, because God is appealed to; his mission and approbation is claimed; and the works



works are samples of all the power claimed as God's messenger, and of all the doctrines taught.

And a divine mission can only be ascertained by supernatural effects produced upon such an appeal; which are adequate samples of all the power claimed. For in reality, the only thing that can make any difference as to the fitness or unfitness of supernatural effects, produced without any controul or opposition, to vouch the divine approbation, is the relation or affinity, more or less, which they have to the doctrines preached, and the particular kind of power or knowledge claimed by the pretended mission. And therefore this was what always seemed to me of chief account, with regard to the signs of power, when a divine mission is claimed: the only quality indeed that is requisite to render supernatural effects proper proofs and signs of the divine approbation and mission; *viz.* "That the  
 " signs produced to prove a mission, have a  
 " plain connexion with the doctrines taught;  
 " and be samples of the very power and know-  
 " ledge claimed as a missionary from God." And I am indeed surprized, that this consideration hath never been called into the reckoning; in making up the proper evidence of a divine mission to teach and confirm certain doctrines.

If the works were not of that kind and nature; one might justly call the claim in question; and ask; " But why no samples of the very power and knowledge claimed? Why  
 " signs of all supernatural power, except that  
 " particular kind of it, which the very mission  
 H " itself



“ itself specially announces ? ” Such a defect in the signs offered would indeed be no slight ground of doubt and suspicion : it being easy to God to enable his messenger to give proper analogous samples of the power and knowledge he pretends to particularly, as sent by him to teach and confirm certain doctrines : and natural and reasonable to think, that it was the power and knowledge specified by the doctrines, that ought to be particularly exemplified by proper signs and experiments. Thus, for example, if a preacher of the resurrection from the dead, should give ever so many proofs of extraordinary supernatural power ; but did not raise the dead ; would there not be good reason to ask, But why no samples of this power to raise the dead ? would it not be natural and reasonable to expect, that this would be the power he would principally choose, to exemplify by samples and experiments. The reasoning will hold equally good, with regard to any other doctrines that may be taught by a pretended messenger from God, and the works he produces to testify the truth of his mission and doctrines.

But when the extraordinary works shew all the power and knowledge that is claimed by the mission ; all is proved by experiment that is claimed : when the works are samples or experiments of the doctrines themselves, all is confirmed by experiments and samples that is asserted. And consequently the whole claim is sufficiently vouched and exemplified. Or samples of power and knowledge are not a proper evidence of power and knowledge. That is, samples of a certain quality, are not samples of that quality.

In



In one word, let any one try with himself, if he can possibly devise any other tokens, or signs, by which God can declare his mission and approbation of a preacher, besides supernatural effects produced to testify such a mission upon an appeal to God, for these very signs of his mission and approbation, which are signs and samples of all the power and knowledge claimed as a missionary, and of all he doctrines taught as such, and he will soon be convinced, “ That  
 “ such signs are indeed the only language by  
 “ which God can converse, or have any com-  
 “ munication with us mortals. The only marks  
 “ or tokens by which he can manifest his will  
 “ and authority. That such works are indeed,  
 “ in the nature of things, proper samples or  
 “ experiments of the divine approbation; or,  
 “ that they have all the properties and charac-  
 “ ters, that can render supernatural effects such  
 “ experiments or samples. And consequently  
 “ that, according to the natural order, con-  
 “ texture, and language of things, and our  
 “ common, natural, and necessary way of rea-  
 “ soning from samples and experiments in every  
 “ other case, they must be referred to that end,  
 “ and held as such.” Any thing that is taught us in this manner, concerning the order and connexion of things, is taught us in the very way that we learn every thing we know concerning the order and connexion of things in nature; that is, by specimen or experiment.



## S E C T. V.

**W**HEN the several branches of this argument are laid together, it shortly amounts to this :

If a preacher of doctrines in themselves probable ; or at least not inconsistent with our justest ideas of God and virtue, to prove his divine mission, not only in the general works samples of extraordinary supernatural power ; but also gives particular samples of every doctrine he teaches, and of every particular kind of power or knowledge he claims, as a teacher sent of God ; and all this upon an appeal to God that he was indeed sent of him ; and had power from him to work such signs to shew the divine approbation ; the mission is certainly proved beyond all controversy. Or a mission may be pretended to ; and the most likely signs of it, we can form any notion of, may accompany an impostor without any opposition or controul : That is to say, a divine mission cannot be proved at all ; whatever signs of extraordinary power are given to establish and confirm the pretension to it ; in so great uncertainty are we about the *Regularity* or *Irregularity* of the divine conduct. Or in other words it is to say ; That it is impossible for God to instruct mankind by a mission ; because such are the powers he hath given to created agents ; or rather such is his administration, that no certain marks can be given of it. He hath not reserved to himself any sure unquestionable signs and tokens, by  
which



which he can make his will and pleasure known. He allows the proper, natural marks and credentials of his mission to be so abused and prostituted, that in reality we can never be certain, when there is a divine mission, or not; even tho' all the conceivable signs, samples, or experiments of it are given that can possibly, in the nature of things, be given. And that is indeed to suppose God strangely limited; nay embarrassed in consequence of his own government of the world: to suppose a government which we can hardly reconcile with our ideas of wisdom, order, and regularity; or with what we know of the divine providence in the natural or moral world.

Or to take the argument in another view, it is to say, That when all the power and knowledge that is claimed by the pretended mission, is proved by experiments analogous in kind, and proportioned in quantity and moment; all is not proved that is claimed. That when all the doctrines preached, are shewn to be true by proper and adequate samples and experiments of of their truth; all that is taught is not proved. And that therefore there is something more necessary to prove a conclusion, than experiments of that conclusion.

But to set this reasoning yet, if possible, in a stronger light; let us suppose it possible that God may connive at a false pretension to a mission, and suffer it to be vouched by the most proper marks and tokens of a mission, for reasons incomprehensible to us; consistently however with his truth and goodness in the government of the whole. And this may be, is  
all



all that ever was, or indeed can be said in opposition to the former reasoning from the divine veracity. Supposing therefore this possibility, let us see how the argument will stand upon that footing. All that can be meant by such a *Possibility*, is that for what we know it may not be *inconsistent* with the good of the whole, to allow such and such credentials to accompany an impostor. And in whatever case it can only be said, for what we know a thing may not be inconsistent; it may be said on the other hand with equal reason; for what we know it may not be consistent. Such a possibility amounts to no more than the not being able to determine repugnance or non-repugnance. But in the nature of the thing, there must be one or other. And therefore when neither the repugnance nor the consistency is capable of proof; the one *may be*, balances the other *may be*: and no regard is to be had to either, in judging of what really happens. Thus then in the present case, supposing neither the consistency nor the inconsistency determinable; the argument from real appearances must run thus:

“ The doctrines are not inconsistent with our  
 “ justest notions of God and virtue, but on the  
 “ contrary in themselves probable. The con-  
 “ duct of the preacher is in every respect suit-  
 “ able to the pretension of a divine mission.  
 “ And the works are such in every respect as  
 “ can possibly be required to vouch a mission;  
 “ such in every article and circumstance as  
 “ God would produce, or order to be produ-  
 “ ced, to shew his approbation, in case of a di-  
 “ vine mission; according to all the ideas we  
 “ are able to frame of proper and fit creden-  
 “ tials to testify a mission. The works are al-  
 “ so



“ so proper and analogous samples of all the  
 “ power and knowledge claimed by the pre-  
 “ tended mission ; or necessary to prove the  
 “ truth of the doctrines taught by the mis-  
 “ sionary.” And therefore according to all ap-  
 pearances there is indeed a mission ; there is all  
 the proof of the mission and of the doctrines that  
 the nature of the thing admits : and more could  
 not possibly be done to vouch and ascertain a  
 mission, or to establish and confirm the doc-  
 trines of the missionary. And not to judge ac-  
 cording to appearances ; or according to the  
 natural tendency and connexion of things ; up-  
 on the account of a meer *may be* counterpoised  
 by a contrary *may be* ; would certainly be ab-  
 surd, and contrary to our way of reasoning in  
 every other case.

But perhaps, the comparing this argument  
 with another reasoning somewhat of a kind,  
 may help not a little to clear the matter.

That in nature God does not multiply  
 causes ; but works always in the same uniform  
 way ; producing similar effects by similar cau-  
 ses, is a maxim in natural philosophy justly  
 thought to be evident of itself ; and to stand in  
 no need of demonstration. Simplicity and u-  
 niformity are so inseparable from wisdom ac-  
 cording to all our ideas of wisdom and perfect  
 working. And that God, to serve any other  
 purpose whatsoever ; will not allow the signs  
 and tokens of his approbation to be produced  
 if he does not approve, seems to me as clear ;  
 and to stand as little in need of demonstration.  
 For darkness is not more contrary to light, than  
 encouraging and confirming error and falshood



is repugnant to truth and wisdom ; if there is any certainty at all in our clearest moral ideas. And what can be called encouraging error and imposture, if giving all the marks and signs of favour, countenance, and protection, to a false pretence, that can be given to a real mission, is not so?

But supposing it quite indeterminable, whether GOD may consistently with his wisdom in the government of the whole, multiply causes and produce like effects by very different causes ; yet who would doubt, upon the account of that *may be* ; that indeterminableness of consistency or inconsistency ; to refer all like effects to the same known familiar cause, which is found to be universal as far as our examination can reach ? 'Tis but judging according to appearances ; and according to the nature of things, to refer all like appearances to the same known cause. And to conclude otherwise would be to judge contrary to all we see and know ; contrary to what nature itself points out to us ; and calls upon us, as it were, to conclude.

In like manner in the other case, supposing the indeterminableness of the consistency, or inconsistency with divine wisdom and truth, of error's having all the marks of truth ; or an impostor's being honoured with all the marks and credentials of a divine mission : yet it is but judging according to the nature of things, to conclude a divine mission, when all the marks of a divine mission that can be conceiv'd, or desired, concur : and to conclude doctrines true, of the truth of which all the proper and requisite experiments are given, that the nature of the



the thing is capable of. And to conclude otherwise would be to judge contrary to all appearances; contrary to the plain language of the facts and experiments; contrary to what the very nature and context of the affair calls, as it were, upon us to conclude.

I find the old objection against taking the nature of the doctrines into the consideration, revived by a late author, and great stress laid upon it: *viz.* "That it involves in a circle."

"Suppose, *says that author* \*, one should ask me why I regard a doctrine to day as true, which formerly I considered as indifferent; I would answer, because it is confirmed by miracles? If it is asked, why I take the miracles to be divine, (for such they must be in order to furnish a proof) I think my answer would be suitable to Mr Clarke's principles, if I should say, because the doctrine is possible, or at least indifferent."

But let any one read what Dr Clarke hath said, and he must be surprized how any one of so distinct, clear an apprehension as that author ap-

\* *I have only seen the treatise in French, and his words are:* "Supposez que l'on me demandât, pour quoi regardez vous aujourd'hui comme vraie une doctrine qui vous paroïssoit auparavant indifferente? Je répondrai parce qu'elle est confirmée par des miracles. Si l'on continue a me demander, pour quoi regardez vous ces miracles comme divins? (car il faut qu'ils soient tels afin de pouvoir fournir une preuve) il me semble que ma réponse sera tout à fait liée avec les principes de Mr Clarke, si je dis, je les regarde comme de bonnes preuves parce que la doctrine est possible ou du moins indifferente."

*Traité sur les miracles par Jacq. Seris, p. 14.*



pears to be, could possibly mistake Dr *Clarke's* reasoning so widely; considering how clearly that excellent author always writes. For what the Doctor says, is to this purpose: That if the doctrine is bad, we may be sure the miracles are not of God. But if the doctrine is not bad, but rather good, such however as cannot be proved from principles of reason to be true; then miracles may prove it's truth. But how do miracles prove the truth of such a doctrine according to the Doctor? Not because the doctrine is indifferent; which would indeed be reasoning in a circle; but because the doctrine being of itself indifferent; if any one should pretend to a mission to prove it's truth; and work miracles to attest his mission; was there indeed no mission such a claim would be controuled; such miracles would be overcome and baffled as the Magicians were by *Moses*. Miracles then prove an indifferent doctrine to be true, because there is reason to conclude, from the divine veracity, "That if the doctrines are in themselves indifferent, miracles without controul would not attend a false pretension to a mission from GOD for teaching these doctrines."

That is the hinge upon which the Doctor's argument turns. And is it a circle to say, that a thing is in itself absurd and consequently incapable of being proved by testimony? Or on the other hand to say, a thing is not absurd, and therefore may be proved by testimony? Don't we reason in that manner every day, about pretended facts or events? we are only at pains to examine the qualities of the testimony offered to prove a thing; when it is in itself possible or not absurd. And is not the reasoning about  
doctrines



doctrines precisely parallel? when it is said,  
 “ Such and such doctrines are absurd, their  
 “ falshood is palpable and evident ; and there-  
 “ fore they cannot be proved to be true by any  
 “ testimony ? ” Or when it is said, on the other  
 hand, That such and such doctrines are not absurd  
 in themselves, and therefore may be proved  
 to be true by testimony of a certain sort ; or at-  
 tended with such and such qualities ; and mi-  
 racles, or certain works are necessary to render  
 the testimony such as may be relied upon? And  
 why then is one of two reasonings, precisely  
 parallel, condemned as a sophistical circle ;  
 and the other constantly admitted without any  
 scruple ?

In one word ; doctrines which are in them-  
 selves consistent, that is, not absurd ; tho’ they  
 cannot be demonstrated from internal principles,  
 or from the nature of things ; may however be  
 proved to be true by proper testimony ; by a sort  
 of extrinsick evidence : and what renders a cer-  
 tain extrinsick evidence credible, when a mission  
 from God is claimed, is the absurdity of sup-  
 posing an extrinsick evidence, so and so quali-  
 fied, to attend an imposture or falshood. And  
 there cannot possibly be any circle in such reason-  
 ing, unless in the general it is a circle to say,  
 “ There is no reason to call the possibility of  
 “ the thing in question ; and the testimony is  
 “ unexceptionable ; therefore the thing must  
 “ be true.” A way of reasoning the most com-  
 mon, the most useful ; nay, necessary in all our  
 affairs of the greatest concernment in life.

And as there is no ground to accuse the argu-  
 ment, from miracles, of a circle, when it is



taken upon this footing; so there is none to be sure to charge it with that failure, when the miracles are found to be samples of all the power and knowledge claimed, as a messenger from Heaven to instruct us; or samples and experiments of all the doctrines taught, and of all the authority pretended to as a Divine Teacher. And such I think I have already proved the works of JESUS CHRIST to be, with regard to his doctrine and his pretension.

## S E C T. VI.

**I**T is said that “ The great pretension of JESUS CHRIST was; That he was the Messiah prophesied of to the Jews: And that miracles cannot prove prophecies to be fulfilled which were not fulfilled: and that it is only from the fulfillment of these predictions in JESUS CHRIST, that his pretension can be proved.”

This is the topic of late much insisted upon, But to say the truth, this objection never mov'd me much; nor appeared to me of very great weight.

Because it is obvious, That prophecies cannot be plain and determinate, without producing great confusion and mischief in the world: But must ever run in a poetical, mystic, figurative, obscure stile; liable to various and uncertain interpretation before the event, and even after the event: unless some other circumstances concur to evince the fulfillment,

And



And this is the case with regard to the antient predictions of the Jewish Messias. They are, as prophecies must necessarily be, in an obscure, figurative, mystic stile. But when we compare the character of JESUS CHRIST, and the circumstances that attended his appearance in the world, with these obscure prophecies, we see these prophecies can be applied to him: and something else renders the fulfillment of them in him indisputable; the mighty works † he wrought; together with his moral character. For he applies them to himself, claims the character of the Messias prophesied of; and at the same time shewed by his works, and the whole of his conduct, that we had sufficient reason to trust him.

If the prophecies could not be applied to him in any tolerable consistent sense; that would indeed be a considerable difficulty, with regard to his pretension. But if they can be applied to him, as clearly as the nature of prophecy admits, and can be applied to nothing else, all circumstances taken in, so consistently, and fully: his applying them to himself is enough, considering what he did to confirm this application. In fine, the only question about this pretension to the predicted Messiaship is, whether from the doctrine, the life, the works of our SAVIOUR, there is not reason to trust his application of certain obscure prophecies to himself? When all the alledged prophecies of the Messias are laid together; they amount to no more than predictions of an extraordinary teacher, and deli-

† Observe only the answer our SAVIOUR gives to St John's message from prison, Matth. xi. 2, &c.



verer, and worker of miracles to appear to the Jews, teaching repentance, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection from the dead. And was not our SAVIOUR such a teacher, such a deliverer; and did he not appear in, and about the time prophesied of, if the meaning of these antient prophecies can at all be guessed at, or ascertained with any tolerable degree of probability?

But whatever be said of these antient prophecies; I must believe, that he who raised the dead, had power to raise the dead; that he who could make happy and miserable; cure all diseases; and banish all infirmities; had power to make happy and miserable.

Say therefore that there never were such prophecies of a Messias; say the arguments fetched from them, were only arguments *ad hominem*; taking advantage of a prevailing notion and expectation, neither of which there is any reason to suspect: say, in short, whatever you please upon this head of prophecies; it will still remain certain and indisputable, “ That the doctrines JESUS CHRIST taught were excellent doctrines; that he gave by the whole of his conduct, all the possible evidences of sincerity and honesty; and that his works were exact and perfect samples of the power he claimed: the power of raising the dead; forgiving sins; and making the good and virtuous happy, and the vicious and unworthy miserable, in the life that is to come: samples of all the power and knowledge he pretended to as our Divine Instructor; and consequently the fittest proofs and experiments,

“ in



“ in the nature of things, of his being sent of  
 “ GOD, with all the power and authority he  
 “ claimed, to instruct us in the knowledge of  
 “ these doctrines which he taught : and that is  
 “ all I have undertaken at present to prove.”

It would be impertinent to insist longer upon this article, when I have nothing new, or that has not been fifty times repeated of late, to offer \*.

\* *Allow me to recommend to you, upon this question, Limborchii amica collatio cum Judæo. No doubt you have seen several excellent treatises upon this subject, occasioned by the Enquiry concerning the Grounds and Reasons, &c. those particularly of the learned and worthy Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry.*

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## S E C T. VI.

**H**AVING thus, my friend, answered my principal design ; allow me just to add a few remarks upon the Christian doctrine, and the reasons why Christianity hath been so much disputed, and controverted.

And the first and chief reason is certainly because natural religion is not sufficiently understood ; nor it's principles fully comprehended. If those who represent the Christian doctrine in certain lights ; understood the principles of natural religion ; they could not possibly entertain such notions of Revealed Religion. And if Christianity was not sadly misrepresented ; those who understood and believed natural religion, could not possibly find fault with Christianity ;

or



or at least oppose themselves to it, so obstinately and vehemently.

Was I even in doubt about the being of a God; and an over-ruling providence, I behoved to reason thus with my self. Tho' there was no God; no providence; virtue would still be the interest of mankind in general, and of every individual in particular: and if there is a God (and that there is all nature cries aloud throughout all her works) the way, the only way, and the infallible way to please him, and recommend our selves to his favour, is by the love and practice of virtue. Virtue therefore is in any case my duty, my interest; if it is my duty and my interest to make myself as happy as I can; or if it is my duty and my interest to promote the interest of society and my kind to the utmost of my power; and these two are inseparably joined and connected together, in the nature of things. Virtue and social affection work at once towards the publick good of mankind, and the private happiness of every particular person. Vice and unsocial affection, on the contrary, work unavoidably towards private as well as publick misery.

Whether therefore there is, or is not a God, my duty and my interest remains the same.

Further, was I in doubt about the Being of a God and a providence; the authority of one who shewed by his works an extraordinary superiority in nature, an extraordinary power and knowledge, would be sufficient to remove my doubts, and assure me that there is a God and a providence; for I could have no reason to suspect



suspect such a teacher, if he shewed in all his conduct the greatest benevolence and compassion towards mankind, and taught a doctrine so consistent; so plausible; so likely of itself (to say no more of it). And so contrary in it's tendency, to any end a deceiver can possibly be supposed to have in view. " That there is a  
 " God and a future state, and that the only  
 " way to recommend to the divine favour and  
 " approbation, either here or hereafter, was by  
 " the practice of virtue, by leading a social rational life." If such testimony or information was offered, all that could be required to render it credible, is an evidence of such knowledge of nature, and the government of the world, as shews the teacher of an order superior to man; and in such a situation that he may certainly know that truth, without any absurdity. And therefore in this sense it may be said, that even the principles of natural religion, the being of a God and a providence, may be proved by revelation, or taught by a divine mission.

But no divine mission can possibly teach another religion than that which nature and reason sufficiently establisheth, if we would but hearken to it's dictates. " That the way, the \* sure  
 " way, the only way to please God, or gain  
 " his approbation, is by the love and practice  
 " of virtue, by imitating his goodness and benevolence, in our sphere, to the utmost of  
 " our abilities." As soon as we form an idea

\* Matth. xii. 30, &c. Luke vi. John xv. 12. James ii. 28. Matth. v. vi. vii. Tit. ii. 11, &c. iii. 6, &c. 1 John iv.



“ of GOD ; we must needs draw this conclusion concerning the way to obtain his favour ; “ That “ the way to please GOD is not by sacrifices ; “ but by works of justice, charity, and mercy.” To speak in the stile of the sacred writings, or in the words of a pagan poet :

*Compositum jus fasque animo, sanctosque recessus  
Mentis, Et incoctum generoso pectus honesto.  
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis Et farre litabo.*

PERS. Sat. ii.

Nature does indeed leave us a little in the dark, not as to the being of a GOD and a providence ; that there is no need of an extraordinary teacher to ascertain ; but as to a future state. And therefore it is reasonable to think, that it must be the main end of a divine mission, if ever GOD instruct mankind in that way ; to satisfy them fully, as to the truth and reality of a future existence : and when this is done, it must infallibly be in this way, so often already repeated. “ That the practice of virtue is the only way to happiness in the future state ; and vice that only which can render “ miserable in it.” And because it is by JESUS CHRIST that immortality is fully ascertained ; and the terms of acceptance with GOD, and of eternal happiness, made clear and sure ; well may it be said ; “ That life and immortality are “ brought to light by his gospel.”

This is evidently the account given of a future state in the gospel of CHRIST ; and no other could be received as true, by those who have just notions of GOD and natural religion : and therefore



therefore if certain christian teachers attended to this lesson of natural religion, they would not place religion, the christian religion, in what they do; or adventure to point out any other road to future and immortal happiness, but this one: which natural reason tells us must be the only way to future happiness, if there is a future state of rewards and punishments: and christianity shews us to be indeed the way to eternal happiness in that future state, which it alone has set beyond all doubt.

And seeing this really is the doctrine of the gospel of JESUS CHRIST; who can find in his heart to oppose Christianity; who would not wish Christianity was true; who would not naturally be prejudiced in it's favour? every virtuous man certainly would; for it is natural to every virtuous spirit to wish for honour, glory, and immortality.

Even those who, unluckily for them, had not the inward satisfaction of believing, would wish well to Christianity for the sake of society and mankind, and like to see so noble, so comfortable, so beneficial a belief prevail universally, and universally produce the good works which it is the end and tendency of the Christian doctrine to promote among mankind.

Let then Christianity have fair play; let us look for the genuine doctrines of Christianity in the gospel of our SAVIOUR; and let us distinguish betwixt them and the vain additions and commandments of men, by which indeed the doctrines and commandments of GOD are rendered of little or no effect; and what is con-



trary to virtue and to piety, and consequently to Christianity, let us set our selves together with all our might to destroy it. But let none who wish well to mankind and society ever think of diminishing the obligations to virtue, the great bond of society and human happiness.

Let us never think of extirpating the most agreeable, the most cheering belief of a future state ; the belief that tends so much to promote virtue and goodness, and without which there is too much ground to fear very little virtue would remain in the world. Let us consider before we declare against Christianity, even tho' at a time we should happen to doubt, whether men would be better fathers, or better husbands ; better sons, or better subjects ; in one word, better members of society, without the belief which true Christianity is designed to propagate in the world ; for wilfully to endeavour to make men worse than they are, is certainly the worst, the most malicious office.

Christianity hath not added any thing to our duty, either towards God or our fellow creatures, that natural reason doth not teach and demonstrate to be our duty ; it only sets the duties of natural religion, or which our natural light teacheth in a clear light ; and sheweth their full and perfect extent, in opposition to false and corrupting misrepresentations, and urgeth to them by motives and considerations the most forcible and engaging, which natural reason is not able to ascertain. Certain motives and inducements to sanctity of life and manners ; and means of improving in piety and virtue ; together with such gratitude to our SAVIOUR himself



self, as such an extraordinary benefactor, well deserves at our hands; are, properly speaking, all that is *Revealed*. All the duties to GOD, our neighbours, or our selves, CHRIST enjoins, are naturally and essentially obligatory; and demonstrable from our natural relation to GOD and our fellow-creatures. For to love GOD and our neighbour is, according to the doctrine of our SAVIOUR, the whole duty of man: The sum of the commandment: The sum of the Law and the Prophets. That is, the great end and purpose of Revelation, in all it's different periods and appearances; and particularly of his Gospel, who, so to speak, came to give the finishing stroke to Revelation, and in that sense to fulfil and perfect the divine law.

And this puts me in mind to observe, that I never met with any objection against the morality of the Christian Religion, except one; "That friendship was not recommended†." And this not a little surprized me; because we have a remarkable example of friendship betwixt our SAVIOUR and his disciple *John*. And at the same time that general benevolence is strongly inculcated by Christianity, without which there can be no truly virtuous friendship; and which naturally must produce friendship, when proper occasion offers of contracting that intimate union of souls, emphatically so call'd, which can't subsist but betwixt honest hearts; and is better understood by feeling than it can be by any de-

† See *Characteristicks*, Vol. III.



inition\* ; nor need I describe it to you, who duly experience it's sincere delights.

\* *To see how naturally true virtuous friendship springs from the universal benevolence Christianity teaches, one needs only read what Lord Shaftsbury says upon that subject in his incomparable treatise upon virtue and merit ; where one will see the difference betwixt generous true friendship, and partial friendship elegantly described.*

## S E C T. VIII.

**B**UT that we may have a just idea of the whole of the Christian Religion ; let us take a short view of the means recommended to Christians for their improvement in virtue and goodness.

In order to become good, and to make progress in virtue, a certain discipline of the mind must be carefully maintained : our life and conduct must be often reviewed and impartially examined. The fancies, the opinions, must be catechized, and often called to a strict account. The excellency of virtue, and the folly and unreasonableness of vice ; the shortness and uncertainty of human life ; the immortality of our souls, and the certainty of future rewards and punishments ; the Divine Providence and perfections ; and, in one word, all the great Principles of religion and morality must be often brought to remembrance, duly weighed, and forcibly impressed : We must often think seriously upon what is right and becoming in this or t'other circumstance ; and what otherwise ; and whence the difference proceeds. 'Tis thus only



ly that the mastership of the passions can be obtained ; or the habit of acting rationally and deliberately can be acquired ; and that one can arrive at such a force and strength of reason as to have ever at command the sense of duty ; a clear and just apprehension of fit and unfit ; and to be habitually in a capacity to act in every situation, with ready discerning, the same worthy and reasonable part.

This self examination so often inculcated by ancient moralists, as absolutely necessary to the right government of the mind and passions ; and living according to the laws of nature and reason, is enjoined upon christians \* in the strongest manner: Private prayer, or private serious address to GOD, in consequence of meditation upon his infinite excellency and perfect administration, is another exercise recommended to christians, in order to their advancement in virtue. And it has indeed been acknowledged by the wise philosophers † to be naturally a proper mean for conquering every unreasonable appetite, and for strengthening and nourishing the rational virtuous disposition ||.

\* *Thus we are often called to think upon our ways ; to examine our selves ; to know what manner of spirit we are of.*

† *I shall only observe upon this head, that Juvenal in his tenth satire, the argument of which is known to be taken from the second Alcibiades of Plato, and the doctrine of Socrates concerning prayer, seems indeed to be laughing at prayer altogether ; even prayer for the moral qualities he so beautifully describes ; as plainly appears from his saying, *monstro quod tibi ipsi possis dare* ; compared with what he says before, *ut tamen & poscas aliquid* : Yet according to the doctrine of Plato and Socrates, praying for, or seeking, the moral qualities was one of the best natural means of acquiring them.*

|| *See the 12th chapter of the gospel of St Luke, and compare it with several other parallel places in the other gospels.*

We



We christians in our devotions, according to the model set before us in the Lord's Prayer (as it is commonly called) and the other directions given us, are to acknowledge with thankful hearts the divine bounty and goodness; and to resign with contentment and approbation, to the divine care, all our outward affairs; and to breath earnestly after all these virtuous qualities which only can render happy and acceptable to our Great Creator, and which it is in our own power to obtain, if we are in good earnest about it; to confess our faults and resolve upon more diligence, caution and circumspection in our future conduct; to adore the divine perfections, his benignity and mercy particularly; implore the divine guidance and assistance; and indulge our selves in generous and benevolent wishes towards all our fellow-creatures; even those who may have on any account merited our displeasure \*.

And surely it is not possible but the mind must be better'd and improved by this exercise, if frequently and duly performed. Nothing can contribute more to humanize and sweeten the temper; to correct and subdue all unruly and inordinate passions; and to confirm and invigorate every good and generous affection.

But besides these two which Philosophy hath ever recommended in some sort; and Christianity only sets in a better and clearer light; there are other means peculiar to Christianity, which are no less proper and fit, in the nature of

\* *We are particularly enjoined in our addresses to God, to declare our sincere forgiveness of all offences done to us.*

things,



things, to ripen and improve the virtuous habits : such as the assembling our selves together the first day of the week, in commemoration of our SAVIOUR'S resurrection from the dead ; the great foundation-stone of our Christian belief ; to hear our common faith and common duties explained ; profess publickly the sense we have of our obligations to love GOD and all mankind ; to do justice, and to delight in charity and mercy ; to forgive injuries, and to walk humbly with GOD ; that is, to maintain a full resignation of mind to infinitely wise Providence, with regard to all that we can neither foresee nor prevent, by our care and anxiety ; and a sincere steady inclination to do what depends upon ourselves wisely and becomingly ; to act a reasonable part in every circumstance of life whether prosperous or adverse. In one word, to profess our common faith ; and to have the impression of our duties refreshed and enlivened by publick prayer, praise, and instruction. This is the end of christian assemblies : and when the publick worship and teaching are suitable to this design, or according to this rule, the effect must be good. And therefore an excellent author very justly observes, " That it would have  
 " rejoiced the heart of a *Socrates*, or any of the  
 " antient moralists, to have seen a publick in-  
 " stitution for the instruction of all men in their  
 " common duties, and in doctrines that have so  
 " strict a connexion with virtue and human hap-  
 " piness." An institution in every respect perfectly well calculated to civilize men, and render them wiser and better : not to mention other lesser advantages, such as, the rest it gives to the labouring part of the creation, to the lower sort of mankind, as well as to the brute animals.



Baptism is another christian institution, very proper for gaining the same virtuous end. It is a very proper rite for preserving the memory of the facts upon which the Christian Faith is founded ; and pointing out emblematically that purity and sanctity which is the chief end of Christianity : and is besides, a chain or link by which Christians are particularly knit together ; without any design however to confine human love within more narrow bounds, than nature itself hath marked out to us.

And the Eucharist, or Lord's-Supper, is another christian institution, very wisely adapted to the same purposes ; with this additional advantage, that whereas Baptism is administered regularly to the infants of christian parents, while they are not capable of reflexion ; the act of communicating in the supper, is an act of reason and judgment : an act of our own free choice, in which he who believes the generous condescension of our SAVIOUR, to suffer death for the good of mankind ; while he meditates upon so noble an example of benevolence and goodness, must needs feel all the generous and noble affections work within his breast, in the most improving as well as delightful manner ; and form sentiments and resolves that can't fail to have a happy and lasting influence upon his temper and disposition.

In all these exercises however, it is recommended, and indeed is absolutely necessary that reason preside ; and that the mind preserve a certain calmness and sedateness ; otherwise contemplation, admiration, and the warm affections which these naturally produce, may run into excess ;



cess; and at last destroy the balance in which soundness of mind consists. The caution the excellent philosopher *Aristotle* \* gives to young contemplators in Philosophy, is equally necessary in Theology. Too great a warmth of affection is dangerous, and ought to be guarded against. And therefore reason must take care to keep the reins, that it may be able to check and controul, examine and regulate, every action and commotion of the mind.

But not only are these means naturally fit and proper exercises, under the guidance of a cool and clear judgment, for the cultivating and improving virtue; but besides, it is promised to Christians, that in the diligent use of them, they shall receive the spirit of CHRIST, the spirit of Grace; an extraordinary assistance †.

The excellent bishop *Tillotson* hath shewn in several of his sermons, that we are to understand by this assistance; by the spirit of GOD, and the seal of the spirit: not any extraordinary revelation from the spirit of GOD to the minds of good men, telling them in particular, that

\* Nor was this prohibition (as a noble Author observes) of the wondering or admiring habit, in early students, peculiar to one kind of philosophy alone. It was common to many; however, the reason and account of it might differ in one sect from the other. All Moralists, worthy of any name, forbid the forward use of admiration, rapture, or ecstasy, even in subjects they esteemed the highest and most divine, to all tyro's in philosophy; being well apprized, that in religious concerns particularly, the habit of admiration and contemplative delight, would, by over-indulgence, too easily mount into high Fanaticism, or degenerate into abject Superstition. *Characteristicks*, Vol. III. p. 37, 202, 203.

† See St Luke xiii. 24. St Matth. vii. 7, &c. and several other texts might be quoted.



they are the children of God ; but strength and firmness of mind, generous principles, sentiments, resolutions and desires influencing the mind and all our conduct. And it is well known, that several of the antient philosophers\* thought a divine *afflatus*, or assistance, necessary, in order to one's arriving to an uncommon pitch of virtue ; of fortitude, and publick spirit particularly. Nor can this doctrine of assistance to the virtuous, be charged with any absurdity, meerly because we cannot point out the way how it is conveyed ; unless every thing is held for absurd that we cannot fully explain. It is certainly very easy to comprehend what it is for noble, generous sentiments and principles to work within our minds, in a strong active, vigorous manner, in consequence of meditation, and other spiritual exercises ; so much may be understood, or rather felt by experience ; and as for the extrinsic conveyance, or assistance in this case, we cannot be more in the dark about it, than we are about the original conveyance or impression of our ideas of sense : for all philosophers are agreed, that they are conveyed into, or impressed upon, our minds by God himself, or at least by some extrinsic cause independent of us : but how, they pretend not to explain.

Certain ways of speaking among Christians, about the spirit of God and it's operations, have been confounded with the genuine doctrine of Christianity about assistance to the virtuous ;

\* Several passages might be brought from the antient philosophers to prove this ; was that needful to one who is so well acquainted with them. *Abſque divino afflatu (ſays Cicero) nunquam vir bonus aut fortis.*



and by this means the true doctrine hath suffer'd not a little. But take it by itself as it really stands; as a promise of growth in knowledge, grace, and virtue; a promise of firmness and steadiness in times of trial and assault; to be acquired in the use of means which are naturally fit to replenish the mind with noble sentiments; and to confirm and strengthen the good affections. Take the Christian doctrine in this view, and no objection can possibly be made against it; whatever may be said of certain false notions concerning the divine spirit and it's workings; whether the produce of melancholy, or of hypocrisy and spiritual pride. There is nothing in the thing promised, in the fact itself unintelligible: and the assurance of such assistance must needs be, to all who believe it, a strong inducement to the serious pursuit of virtue. It is in the power of all men to be good, if they will but be in earnest about it: the chief difficulties to be overcome arise from evil customs, from contracted vitious habits. But it is not only in our power to conquer these by due diligence and labour; but it is in the power of Christians to do more than others, if they are not remiss in their endeavours; because of the assistance promised to them. And if the virtues of heathens reproach Christians, and cast them at a distance; it is because they are wanting to themselves; and do not give due pains to do honour to their master and his religion. If they did; they should indeed shine as lights in the world; and others seeing their glorious example, would give glory to God; and fall in love with a religion which produced such useful members of society; such noble patterns of every good and praise-worthy action. And indeed the lives of heathens ought  
to



to render christians ashamed ; and to excite a noble emulation to excel them : and for that reason, What do we more than others? is a question Christians cannot too frequently put to themselves.

I have not entered upon the enquiry, What is precisely meant by the spirit of GOD ; the spirit of CHRIST ; the HOLY GHOST the comforter ; and such like phrases. An assistance is plainly promised to Christians, and that is the main point. And it is enough to our present purpose, to have shewn, that the works of CHRIST are proper samples of his power to impart this promised assistance : and that the proofs he gave of his sincerity and his ability, are more than sufficient to satisfy us, that we may depend upon his word and promise.

I likewise forbear enquiring into the meaning of certain ways of speaking, concerning the personal dignity and rank of our SAVIOUR : not that there seems to me any considerable difficulty in the matter ; notwithstanding of all the disputes upon that head, when scripture language is attended to, and all foreign scholastic terms are laid aside. But because upon this subject, I could not possibly do more than transcribe from pens I am not able to imitate. His mission and relation to Christians, as our instructor and SAVIOUR, is clearly told. And how his works, together with the indisputable evidences he gave of sincerity, and good generous intention, prove that point ; (which must be acknowledged to be of main consequence,) we have already seen. One thing however may be added : “ That tho’ we know not the various  
“ degrees



“ degrees of created agents, and communica-  
 “ ted power; and cannot determine what works  
 “ GOD only can do: yet greater works than  
 “ those of JESUS CHRIST, the raising the  
 “ dead particularly we cannot conceive, unless  
 “ it is creating: and therefore the works he  
 “ wrought are as proper samples as could pos-  
 “ sibly be given of his claim to any order or  
 “ rank in being whatever it be: and conse-  
 “ quently we have sufficient proof of that claim;  
 “ especially when the evidences of his truth and  
 “ sincerity are taken into the account; and it is  
 “ likewise remembred what ground we have  
 “ shewn there is to believe, *That GOD would*  
 “ *have controuled and opposed him, if his claim had*  
 “ *been false or blasphemous.* ’Tis power and  
 “ knowledge in different degrees, that makes  
 “ the difference amongst beings; GOD, for ex-  
 “ ample, is supreme, because his power and  
 “ knowledge is underived and infinite: And  
 “ power or knowledge of any degree, can only  
 “ be proved or made known by samples of power  
 “ and knowledge in that kind and degree.”

Thus we see that the rules Christianity gives  
 for the conduct of life are excellent. Whatso-  
 ever is noble, generous, or praise-worthy; it is  
 that, we are commanded by JESUS CHRIST to  
 seek after. To give all diligence, to add vir-  
 tue to virtue, that we may obtain glory, ho-  
 nour, and immortality, is the whole of our  
 christian calling. And how then can we ever  
 induce ourselves to think, a teacher an impo-  
 stor, who taught so pure and perfect a system of  
 religion and morals, without any allay of folly  
 or superstition; and who had no other end in  
 view, but to make men wiser and better. And  
 after



after all, if he is supposed an impostor, our obligation to live according to the very same precepts and rules he gave must be acknowledged; if a rational creature is obliged to act rationally; or if there is any difference between wisdom and folly, reasonable and unreasonable. For virtue is certainly the interest of every particular person, as well as of mankind in general, even when this world only is taken into the account; and much more must it be owned to be so, if any regard ought to be had to another life; to which every thinking person will reckon himself obliged to have regard, if the notion cannot be clearly demonstrated to be a dream without any foundation. And that was never yet pretended.

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#### S E C T. IX.

**B**UT because there are some obscure passages even in the gospels; tho' that is easily accounted for; another remark that I would make, is; That there cannot possibly be any article of faith about what is obscure and disputable as to it's meaning in the christian revelation, but this one; " That it is obscure and " disputable; and God can never require of " us to understand that which is not made plain." To throw away or despise what is clear, and evidently useful in any work, because there are other things we can't make any certain sense of, is certainly most unreasonable. And for those who are agreed together in the belief of what is plainly told, to fall out, and treat one another rudely, because of different opinions about what is obscure, is no less so. And yet would but christians



christians remember this, the controversies that divide them so much, would soon be at an end; or at least all disputes among christians would be carried on and managed in a most amicable, agreeable manner. Whatever obscurity there may be elsewhere, there is none at all in the precepts, which are of indisputable obligation. Charity, benevolence, moderation and humanity, are clearly enjoined: and to the practice of these virtues it is, that eternal life and happiness is as clearly promised. Is it not therefore very odd and surprizing that christians who consent in this; that the practice of these duties is the chief thing; and that the doctrine of a future state and a resurrection from the dead, is the main doctrine of Christianity, the doctrine of chief importance; should not reason with one another about the meaning of certain places in the sacred writings, which they both own to be of difficult interpretation, with all calmness, good nature, and modesty?

In the mean time nothing can be more certain than that what is not plainly and distinctly revealed to us, and of easy certain interpretation, can only be designed for an exercise of charity and friendly conference or dispute.

To believe that what is obscure is of vast importance, and that our salvation depends upon the hitting the meaning rightly; is a notion contrary to all our natural ideas of God and his divine perfections; it is supposing a divine revelation a snare, or sphinx. If therefore there is any thing obscure and difficult in the sacred writings; let those who have time and leisure endeavour to explain it. And if men of learning

M

differ



differ in their sentiments; let them not however tear and devour one another on that account as wild beasts: but remember that love is the end of the commandment: and that tho' one should have the gift of interpretation; nay the gift of working miracles and of prophesying; yet if he hath not charity *all is vain and of no value. God is love and he that is of God is love.* If it is said; that after all there cannot be much virtue or merit in the faith of the common-people, because they cannot possibly philosophize about miracles, and their connexion with doctrines: I answer, that I am far from thinking that it is belief, however rational and well founded, that can recommend to God; it is only a good life and conversation. And if the faith of the common-people produce this effect, they will be accepted of God, because of their virtue, piety and goodness, without regard to the grounds upon which their belief is founded. But the great advantage of Christianity is; that it is able to give rational satisfaction to the philosopher, about points of the greatest importance; and at the same time to excite the inferior herd of mankind to the practice of virtue, in the way that they are most capable of being moved and influenced. And yet however difficult it may be to make the common-people understand the bulls of popes, the creeds of councils, a metaphysical catechism; it is not so hard a task to make the meanest mechanic comprehend the genuine doctrines of *Christianity*, and their connexion with the works of *CHRIST*. Nor is the historical evidence, when represented in a simple familiar light, as it may easily be, above the vulgar reach. Every body reasons about things of the same kind every day.

If



If you ask me, my friend, how an unbeliever, living among christians, ought to be treated by christians? I answer; with all tenderness, compassion, and good will, for so humanity requires, so Christianity teaches; and that is the only way to bring in those that are without.

If you ask me, what may be his fate hereafter? I answer, "Every man will be judged by his works." And one who is conscious to himself of no prejudice against Christianity, that he has examined it fairly, and yet can't help doubting; if at the same time he leads a virtuous and regular life; has nothing to fear; so Christianity as well as reason teaches me. Virtue is the main thing, the end of believing; and the best and worthiest part that one can act in matters of opinion and belief, is to examine impartially. This is an eternal immutable truth: "That he who feareth GOD, loveth mercy, and worketh righteousness, will be accepted of GOD; who hath no respect of persons, but will judge every one according to his works \*." But no unbeliever, who loves mankind and society, will take it amiss to be put in mind; that whatever his opinion may be of the evidences and grounds of the Christian Religion; it is doing a real mischief to mankind and society, to endeavour to destroy or diminish the faith and persuasion of a future state of rewards and punishments. Οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅτι τὰ πολυχρονιώτατα καὶ σοφώτατα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, πό-

\* And this is what GOD hath taught us by JESUS CHRIST, Acts x. 34, &c.



λαίς καὶ ἔθνεσιν, θεοσεβείας ἕνεκα, καὶ αἱ φρονιμότητος  
ἡλικίας, Θεῶν, ἐπιμελεσάμενοι.

## ΞΕΝΟΦΩΝΤΟΣ ΑΠΟΜΝΗΜΟΝΕΥΜΑΤΩΝ

Κεφ. δ'. 15.

In my next I will give you my sentiments concerning the historical evidence of the works of JESUS CHRIST; and at the same time my opinion of the antient Magic, so much talked of. In the mean time it is obvious, " That those who were eye-witnesses to the works of our SAVIOUR, had the same evidence for the truth of his pretension, That those have of the skill of a painter, who see him draw a fine picture; or of the truth of a conclusion who see the experiments performed, from which it naturally and necessarily follows."

*I am, &c.*

## QUERIES.





# Q U E R I E S.



## Q U E R Y I.

**W**HETHER samples of a certain power, do not prove that power: Or if any thing else is necessary to prove a certain power, besides samples of that power: samples analogous in kind, and appropriated in quantity or moment?

And in consequence of this, whether samples of a power to raise the dead, do not prove a power to raise the dead; and whether samples of a power to deliver from all kind of diseases and infirmities, do not prove a power to deliver from all kind of diseases and infirmities; and whether samples of power to confer certain qualities and blessings, do not prove power to confer these qualities and blessings?

Q U E R Y



## QUERY II.

WHETHER the principal, if not all the doctrines of CHRIST are not assertions of his having power to raise the dead, and deliver from miseries; and confer blessings; to deliver from such kind of miseries, and confer such kind of blessings as his works were proper and natural samples or experiments of? And what sample or samples are wanting, to make the evidence of his having any power he claimed by his doctrines, full and compleat?

## QUERY III.

WHETHER it is more natural and reasonable to think, that God would controul the power of any Being who pretended a mission from him which he had not; and not suffer him to produce all the extraordinary works he appealed to, as signs of the divine mission and approbation? Or that God would let one appeal to him for his approbation; and give all the evidences and signs of it, to which he appeals as proofs, without any check or controul; full samples of all the power and knowledge he pretended to as a divine missionary? which of these two conclusions is most consonant to our notions of order and wise administration; our natural conceptions of God; and to what we know of the divine government of the natural or moral world?



## QUERY IV.

WHETHER an uninterrupted course of honesty, goodness, faithfulness, and benevolence, be not sufficient to create trust? And whether there was any thing in the conduct of JESUS CHRIST, that could beget diffidence and mistrust; or any thing wanting to put his honesty, sincerity, and good intention beyond all doubt?

## QUERY V.

WHICH of the doctrines of our SAVIOUR has not a direct tendency, and powerful influence, to excite and encourage to the practice of piety and virtue; and what is wanting to render the doctrine of our SAVIOUR, a compleat system of religion and morality, in point of precepts, motive or means: what in point of duty, that reason does not demonstrate to be duty; what in point of motive, that is not in itself probable tho' not certain; or what is in respect of means that is not fit and proper, in the nature of things, to improve and promote virtue and goodness, to the highest degree of perfection human nature is capable of?

## QUERY VI.

WHETHER therefore abstracting from the truth of Christianity, a better public doctrine can be devised; whether mankind would live  
more



more comfortably and virtuously without the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments, and the other motives Christianity furnisheth to the practice of benevolence and righteousness; and consequently whether it is a kind office to mankind to endeavour to destroy that belief; or whether it is not the part of a good member of society, and an honest man, to consider well before he publishes to the world his singular notions, whether the promulgating them may not have a bad effect; contribute to lessen the regard to virtue; or at least the restraints from vice?

These Queries serve to give a short view of the chief design of this ENQUIRY.

*FINIS.*





